



Thorley

Registered Charity No: 1182852

Newsletter

September/October 2026

No. 80



From our Chair

Hello everyone and welcome to the combined September and October Newsletter. Please take some time to read it and take note of the things that are happening over the next few months.

At the September meeting we will be celebrating our 15th birthday. This is great news and is very much down to the dedication and commitment given by many people over the past 15 years.

Long may it carry on!

However, at the end of the year (only four months away) both Linda Ketteridge and I will be standing down from our current posts. Please read the 'We Need You' section further on.

New membership cards will be available to collect at Monday's meeting and Barbara Jacobs has agreed to stay after the talk to hand out cards as well as before the meeting.

Now, we probably all have one, some people will even know it off by heart, others will have to try and find it. I am referring to your NI or National Insurance Number which you will no doubt have had to use from time to time. You normally get a letter about the time you turn 16. This number sticks with you for life!

The National Insurance Act of 1911 formed the basis of NI as we know it today. Historically employers were expected to buy a special stamp at the Post Office and attach them to contribution cards on behalf of the employees. In 1948 the new National Insurance system was introduced. The format of your number hasn't changed much, two letters, six digits and one final letter. In 1984, the plastic National Insurance card was introduced replacing the old cardboard version. I expect some of you may still have it!!

Best wishes to you all

Nigel

FUTURE EVENTS

MONTHLY MEETINGS

Our meetings are in the United Reformed Church (URC) in Water Lane, Bishop's Stortford CM23 2JZ.

Please make sure your mobile phone is switched off or muted.



Monday September 7th Our 15th Birthday meeting!

To celebrate our birthday, we will be sharing a special birthday cake. Doors open as usual at 1.30pm, with cake cutting at 1.45pm. This means that the Chair's welcome and the Speaker will be around quarter of an hour later than usual. Read our 15-year history later in the Newsletter.



OUR SEPTEMBER SPEAKER will be 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'.



Monday October 5th

OUR OCTOBER SPEAKER will be Andy Stuart

Churchill's Intervention in the Russian Civil War

Officers' mutinies and volunteers for Churchill's North Russian Relief Force. Recruiting from the prisons. What could possibly go wrong?

Exploring a forgotten period of British history and Churchill's involvement in it.

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



**Saturday 24th October, 6.40 for 7.00pm
at Thorley Community Centre
Friedberg Avenue CM23 4RF (near The Harvest Moon pub)
including supper – Fish or Chicken & Chips or
Crunchy Green Heroes & Chips**

TO BOOK

Email Chrissy Thear at events.thorleyu3a@gmail.com saying how many tickets you want, and how many with fish or chicken or the vegetarian option.

Chrissy will then email you back to confirm you have the places you want and details of how to pay.

Teams should ideally be no more than 8 people. If there are singles or couples, we will put you together to make up a team

**THIS IS A VERY POPULAR EVENT SO IT IS
RESTRICTED TO THORLEY U3A MEMBERS ONLY.
SORRY, NO FAMILY OR FRIENDS.**

Please bring your own drinks, glasses, snacks and pens and please take your own rubbish home afterwards.

Sunday Line Dancing Workshop

Helen Nicholls, who has run regular Line Dancing groups for us in the past, is now offering occasional Line Dancing workshops for Thorley u3a.



U3A

Line Dance WORKSHOP

with Tea and Cake

Helen's
-LINE DANCE-

-  **NO PARTNER NEEDED**
-  **ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS AND EXPERIENCED DANCERS WELCOME**
-  **FUN**
-  **SOCIABLE**
-  **TEA**
-  **CAKE**

★ **THORLEY COMMUNITY CENTRE** ★
SUNDAY 27TH SEPTEMBER
3.30 TO 5PM
£10

♥ TO BOOK CONTACT HELEN ON 07957634461 ♥

The first one will be on Sunday September 27th. Starting at 3.30pm at the Thorley Community Centre, the cost is £10 and includes tea and cake.

Everyone is welcome, from complete beginners to experienced line dancers. Helen says the main thing is that it will be a sociable, fun event.

To book, ring or text Helen on 07957 634461.

NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

New Committee Member



We are delighted to welcome Alastair Curbun to our Thorley u3a Committee. Alastair was co-opted as our new Groups Co-ordinator at the August meeting of the committee.

He takes over from Annie Compton who stood down earlier this year.

Alastair will be a familiar face to many of you because he heads up the Wine and Beer Appreciation Group.

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

URGENT

WE NEED YOU!

Could You Be Our Next Chair or Vice Chair?

Both our Chair, Nigel Varnam, and Vice Chair, Linda Ketteridge, will come to the end of their three-year roles in January and we need to find new members to take on their jobs.

Please give this serious consideration because Thorley u3a can't exist without these essential officers on the committee.

Nigel and Linda both say they have really enjoyed their time heading our u3a and have found their jobs enormously rewarding.

If you think it's something you could take on, please speak to any member of the committee. And you will be very welcome to come to a committee meeting (on the morning of the third Thursday of the month) to see what goes on.

Nomination forms are available from our Business Secretary, John Acklaw, and must be submitted by December 14th, with elections at our AGM on January 4th.

Your Riviera Travel Bookings Could Help Us

If you are thinking of booking a holiday with Riviera Travel – well known for their tours, river and ocean cruises, and solo holidays – please consider booking it direct through their Affinity scheme.

If you do so and nominate Thorley u3a, Riviera will donate to us the money that they would otherwise have paid to a travel agent in commission. Over the last few years we have received substantial sums from the scheme which have allowed us to make grants to our groups.

All you have to do is book online, then within 48 hours of the booking, email affinity@rivieratravel.co.uk or phone 01283 523470 with your booking reference and the name of Thorley u3a. Or you can book by phone at 01283 248304, again mentioning Thorley u3a.

Bookings made through travel agents or third-party booking sites do not qualify.

New Sashes for Meeters & Greeters



Our wonderful Meeters & Greeters are looking especially smart with their new sashes.

The team includes Elaine Forrest, Marjorie Greaves, Angela Langthorne, Anne Mayes, Janet Seabridge, Chrissy Thear and Susan Williamson.

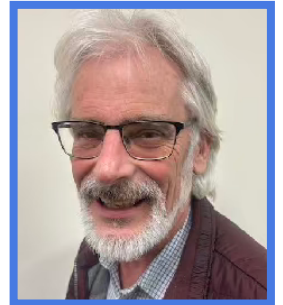
At all our meetings, they welcome members, especially new members, and provide a helping hand whenever needed.

How to Collect Your Membership Card



Our Membership Secretary, Barbara Jacobs, will be giving membership cards to those who have paid their subs at our September meeting. To prevent queues blocking the entrance, Barbara will be stationed in front of the stage.

Assistant Treasurer, Tony Clark, will also be there to take payments.



However, please remember that our preferred method of payment is by bank transfer – see full details of how to pay on the Subs page below.

Membership cards can be posted if you send Barbara an SAE with your name and membership number – her address is on the next page.

Committee Email Addresses Will Change

For many years Thorley u3a committee members have been using email addresses in the form of XXXX.thorleyu3a@gmail.com. In case of lost or forgotten passwords, or the need to allocate an email address to a new committee member, a single person has held the recovery phone number for all of these accounts. This has often caused unnecessary difficulty and considerable management time.

So we have now obtained our own internet domain name of thorleyu3a.com and will be changing all the committee email addresses and cloud data storage (where committee files are kept) over to the new domain during the coming weeks. The new system, which is called Google Workplace, is free for charitable organisations like ours and will allow us to have more than one administrator, as well as a resilient and professional email and storage system.

What does this mean for members? Committee email addresses will change from XXXX.thorleyu3a@gmail.com to XXXX@thorleyu3a.com.

Throughout the changeover period, the Contact Page on the website will be kept up to date and will be the most reliable way of contacting committee members. And as the new email addresses become available, they will be the ones used in the Newsletter and other communications. Meanwhile, if you have any old contacts for our committee members in your own email system, we recommend you delete them to avoid confusion.

Ken Blethyn

NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Subs Reduced to Just £10

Following a review of our finances, your Committee 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 are now payable. Membership cards can be collected at meetings, or send an SAE to Barbara Jacobs, our Membership Secretary (address below).

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

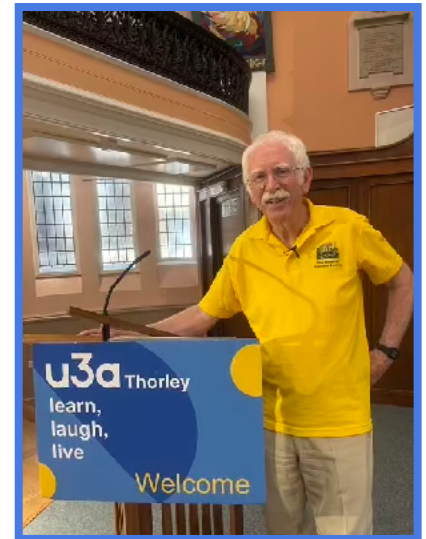
Payments: All other money - groups/trips/events

LAST MONTH'S SPEAKER

August: Ken McDonald

Ken is Secretary of the 100 Parishes and he gave us a talk entitled 'A Peek Inside Some Churches in the Hundred Parishes'. The area covered by the 100 Parishes comprises North West Essex, North East Hertfordshire and South Cambridgeshire.

Ken had a fascinating collection of photographs showing many of the churches in the parishes (including our own St James the Great Church here in Thorley).



It was an inspiring presentation designed to stimulate the desire to visit the Churches and sample the architecture and some of the features described. A church visit can often be accompanied by a walk that includes the church – and maybe the local pub as well! The Society website has a range of suggestions for walks. Our own U3A walking groups know some of the walks and might be inclined to pursue others as a result of Ken's talk.

Ken told us afterwards that he has never spoken to such a large audience as ours and he must have been thrilled to get so many questions at the end which demonstrated the interest that he had inspired.

Back to Talliston House

Our speaker in November 2023 was John Tarrow, who told us all about Talliston House, 'Britain's most extraordinary home', which is so close to us in Dunmow. The *Bishop's Stortford Independent* of August 12th had a large article devoted to his intriguing house. Remember where you heard about it first – here at our U3A!

The article had a whole host of pictures about the house and its events (more at www.talliston.com). John also said that the recent Dunmow Bookfest that we told you about in a previous Newsletter was so successful that he and other local authors completely sold out of books.

Barry Maxwell



2011-2016

Thorley u3a Celebrates 15 Years



In September 2011 a number of people got together to discuss setting up Thorley u3a. In doing this, they had support from the national u3a office, together with Harlow, Bishop's Stortford and Stansted u3as.



The following month an inaugural meeting (*pictured*) was held at the Thorley Community Centre, attended by around

100 people. A committee was elected with Gillian Micallef as our first Chair and Sue Cranston as our first Vice Chair. Also elected to the committee were Kim Hollylee, Sylvia Poole, Neal Fish, Pam Webb, Anne Daultrey, Jean Pyatt and Annis Cove.

Things started to move quite quickly, with more members joining, groups being set up, a website established by David Aitken and meetings held every month at the Thorley Community Centre.

But by January 2012 another group booked our slot at Thorley Community Centre, so monthly meetings were moved to the Rugby Club. Speakers were booked for every meeting and over the years we have enjoyed a huge variety, from history to comedy, wildlife to showbiz.

The first AGM was held on October 1st 2012. By this time membership had increased to 270 people, with 19 groups formed. Gillian decided to retire (though later served again on the committee as Vice Chair) and Richard Masters was elected as Chair.

Richard also produced our first Newsletter – a job which has since been done by Kim Shaw, Carmen Konopka, Ian Hudson, Dave Willett and now Carmen again.

Many people have been instrumental in running Thorley U3A. In 2015 Liz Happer took over as Chair, followed by Linda Ketteridge in 2018, Carmen Konopka in 2021 and Nigel Varnam in 2024.

So many people have served as committee members over the years that it is impossible to name them all. However, one particularly significant role is that of the Treasurer, first held by Mick Wickens and subsequently by Fred Grover, Pam Archer, Ken Blethyn and now Ryland Perrin.

Mick Wickens established our first computerised spreadsheet of members, responsibility for which was taken over by John Bailey, who served first as Membership Secretary and then as Assistant Treasurer. John then took on the job of putting all of that information onto the national u3a Beacon database – a huge task.



First meeting of the Walking Group

We should also mention Dave Pyatt, who was responsible for registering us with the Charity Commission in 2019 when he was Business Secretary – again a substantial project. Kathryn Aitken has organised refreshments at our meetings for many years, Richard Masters has headed up the Tech Team, and Nick Ambrose has administered our Google account, while Terry Rhoda has co-ordinated our diary.

As well as members setting up groups, over the years a number of people have organised many superb holidays, day trips and theatre outings, notably Maggie Bennett, Sylvia and Ed Poole, Liz Happer, Richard Masters, Jim Hook and Dave Willett. There have also been Christmas lunches each year and a number of Quiz Nights.



Table Tennis Group competing in a Championship in 2013

In 2022 to raise the national u3a profile in its 40th year, a High Street Survey Project was published, with John Bailey, Diana Austin, Duncan Palmer and Hilary Allen doing the survey for Bishop's Stortford.



Zumba Group in 2013

By May 2013 we had outgrown the Rugby Club so monthly meetings were moved to the Barnabas Centre. Covid hit in 2020 and we all learned how to use Zoom for our meetings and group activities. When we were able to meet in person again, it was decided to move monthly meeting to the Charis Centre, where we stayed until this Spring when we moved to the United Reformed Church.



U3A Singers in 2018

We currently have 673 members and offer more than 40 groups. Our activities are organised by our members for our members. Their energy and enthusiasm is what has made Thorley u3a such a vibrant organisation for us all – truly a place where we can fulfil the u3a motto of 'learn, laugh, live'.

Carmen Konopka
2011-2013 Pictures: David Aitken



Trip to Neasden Hindu Temple 2019

GROUP REPORTS

Holiday to Lille, Bruges and Arras



On Monday August 3rd, a group of us set off on a very comfortable coach to cross the channel to France on another lovely holiday organised by Margaret Bennet.

After a very smooth and comfortable crossing we arrived at our destination, the Mercure Aeroport Hotel just outside Lille, our base for the next four nights.

Next morning it was off to Lille for a wander. The majority of us booked a 50-minute tour of the city on an open-top tourist bus. The commentary was in English and there were also small screens on board, which often showed the inside of the building we were passing at the time.

After the bus tour, several of us walked to the Bell Tower, one of the key attractions in the city. One hundred steps led up to the first floor where a four-person lift whisked us up to the penultimate floor for a climb of another 25 steps to the viewing platform and a 360° view.

Back to the hotel for drinks, dinner, a quiz and bingo delivered by our cheerful tour leader Nathan. Not being completely tired, several members of our group finished off the evening with a game of table football, which became very competitive. Who knew senior citizens could have so much fun!

Wednesday was a day spent in the beautiful Belgian city of Bruges. Often called the Venice of the North, it must be one of the most popular and most visited European cities. There was plenty to interest everyone as we wandered around the cobbled streets, some took a boat ride along the canal system, under numerous bridges, or a horse and carriage ride or merely soaked up the atmosphere sitting in a pavement café.



On Thursday morning we were taken by Mark, our friendly coach driver, to Arras, an historic town famed for its 17th century Flemish Baroque style squares, which were rebuilt to plan after their almost complete destruction during a major WWI battle. Some of our group went up the Belfry tower above the Town Hall for the panoramic views, while others went underground to see the *Boves*, the Medieval underground tunnels which served as shelters for local people during the war years.

But for many of us the highlight of the day was our afternoon visit to the WWI Canadian Memorial at nearby Vimy Ridge. The beautiful 27-metre high monument built on the top of the Ridge commemorates the 11,151 missing Canadian soldiers with no known grave, who died fighting for the freedom of France and Europe. We all found it a very moving experience.



Friday saw us back on the road home after what we all agreed was a very interesting, educational and social short holiday. Thanks again to Maggie for being brave enough to organise a trip which satisfies such a diverse group of people. Here's to next year's holiday which we hope you will organise again.

Liz Happer

Lots Happening at the History Group

Following Dave Parker's request for assistance, Ray Archer has agreed to take on the computer and communications aspect of running the group and will soon be sending emails to members via Beacon.

Meetings are on the second Thursday of the month at the Emmaus Centre, Church Lane, Thorley CM23 4BE at 10.00. Refreshments are provided after the talk. There is a small car park by the Centre, with additional parking in the main St church car park.

Ray Archer

History Group Programme

September 10th: 'That was the building that was – a pictorial history of Bishop's Stortford' by Stewart Marshall.

October 8th: 'Major Robert Thompson – International Entrepreneur' by Alan Thomson.

November 12th: 'George Edward Pritchett – Local Architect and Surveyor' by Chris Connell.

December 10th (provisional): 'Olympic Oddities' by Dave Parker.

Dave Willett gave an interesting talk on medals at the July meeting. He explained how the Romans were the first to invent medals. Later, he talked about examples of medals from the civilian world, the sporting world and the military world from different countries. All medals have interesting stories because of the achievements they represent.

One of the group brought in his Police Long Service Medal (*right*) awarded for 30 years as a police officer. Dave also showed his family's Second World War medals.



The most impressive one was a large bronze one which another member brought in (*left*). It is called the Memorial Plaque or 'Dead Man's Penny'. 1,355,000 were sent to families of deceased servicemen in the First World War. 450 tons of bronze was used. It is 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter and weighs 12 ounces, almost as heavy as a jar of jam.

Dave Willett





Those History Group members who defied the dire warnings of a record heatwave and turned up to the surprisingly cool Emmaus Centre on the morning of August 13th were rewarded by a fascinating talk by Mark Radcliffe.

The topic was the history of pirate radio stations, and Mark presented an impressive blend of still images, historical video and audio recordings. Although the main focus was on the misadventures of the famous and groundbreaking Radio Caroline, the entire history of pirate radio stations was covered.

The audience, enjoyed the nostalgia Mark triggered, and there was a lively discussion afterwards, with many members recounting their own youthful memories .
Dave Parker

Feline Visitor to Flex and Tone Group



We had a little furry visitor in our Flex and Tone class at South Mill Arts.

Didn't seem fazed by us all exercising around him at all!
Mandy Cousins

Northamptonshire Garden Visit



Garden Group 2's August event was a coach trip to Coton Manor and Gardens in Northamptonshire.

The house dates back to the 1600s, while the gardens, covering 10 acres, were laid out in the 1920s. They are carefully planted with impressive and colourful herbaceous borders of roses, dahlias and many unusual plants.

The natural springs and ponds flowing through the site, together with mature woodlands and wildlife also add to the character of the gardens.

Roger Thear

Back to School for Family History Group



At the end of July, the Family History group visited the British Schools Museum at Hitchin.

After tea and biscuits, we were straight into the Victoria era with a lesson in the classroom. We quickly revised how to add up pounds, shillings and pence, including farthings, using an abacus and were then allowed to take our slates out of our desks to practise handwriting.

As we were so good we moved onto pen and ink. However, Ian and I were reprimanded and told that we would have to have our left hands tied behind our backs the following day for attempting to write with the wrong hand!

Unfortunately, Christine could not remember Queen Victoria's birthday and had to wear the dunces cap, and then Mark was forced to own up for running out of school and knocking the headmaster over. He had a few strokes of the cane.



We followed this with a talk about the Monitorial System which operated in the Hitchin school. Senior pupils assisted the single teacher by supervising a row of children and when they could write their letters correctly in the sand tray the teacher would assess them.

A complex set of instructions allowed the children to move to a designated place around the walls of the classroom, where they stood in a semi-circle.

They were instructed and tested on that day's lesson, moving up or down the semi-circle, depending upon the right or wrong answer. You couldn't move up a desk until you had mastered the work. Quite often older students who had not performed well would be seated with children two or three years younger than themselves.

In both these classrooms the windows were high up to prevent daydreaming and looking away from the lesson.

We had some time to look at the WWI and WWII classrooms before touring the headmaster's house and looking at the special exhibitions. In the Unmentionables display we learnt about potties, bloomers and potions.

We finished the morning with toasted sandwiches. We would recommend this museum to anyone who has an interest in history or education. The British Schools Museum only survives through admission fees, so please try and support it.

Sue Swan



THORLEY u3a COMMITTEE



Nigel Varnam
Chair



Linda Ketteridge
Vice Chair



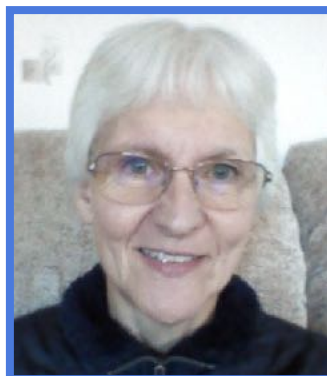
Ryland Perrin
Treasurer



John Acklaw
Business
Secretary



Alastair Curbbun
Groups
Co-ordinator



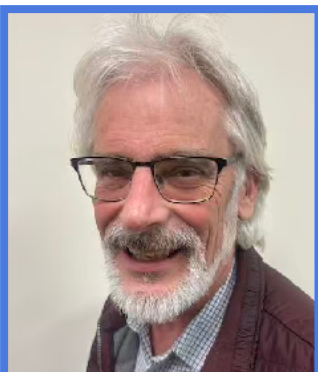
Barbara Jacobs
Membership
Secretary



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