



Chester Times

June 2024



Musings from the Chair



My **Wow!** list this month was very difficult to construct. I decided to feature apps on my phone, but then I realised that I have more than 150. Many are rarely, if ever, used but there are a dozen or so which are "essential" in the sense that my life would be very difficult to run without them. These include email, WhatsApp, Signal, FaceTime, my bank, my electricity supplier, my daily newspaper, iPlayer, Trainline, a

dictionary (for crosswords), control of my radiators, Kindle, Apple Music and Google Translate. These no longer wow me, they are just part of my daily life.

I could find just three which still astonish me: Merlin, Shazam and my jigsaw program (I use Magic Puzzles). Jigsaws fill in those odd moments when I want to relax and not think about u3a business. Merlin I have written about before: it recognises birds from their song. Shazam does the same for music, and not only does it tell me what is playing, but which version - orchestra, conductor, soloist, recording date and everything. I am wowed by the fact that the apps can do this, but frustrated by my ability to use them. Because I tend not to keep my phone in my hand (I am not a teenager) it takes me a while to reach the phone and open the app, by which time the music - or particularly the bird - has stopped (or changed its tune!). Grrr!

I cannot give an award for a lifetime achievement because apps are usually written by teams of people. Instead I will, exceptionally, offer two gripes. The first is the plethora of parking apps - I have four on my phone and I really only want one which operates everywhere. The second is the NHS app: this is an excellent idea, but lets itself (and me) down because now I can tell that some of my medical records are wrong. Sometimes it's better not to know!

You have almost certainly heard of Newton's Laws: His first law says: An object will not change its velocity unless and until a force acts on it. A football on the ground will not move until you kick it; it then won't stop until it hits something, or gravity (a force) pulls it to earth and/or the drag of the air (another force) slows it down. The second law is usually expressed as the simple equation $F=ma$. If you apply a force, **F** to an object with mass, **m**, it will move off with acceleration **a**. So it will go on getting faster until you remove the force. When you kick the football of course you remove the force almost immediately, but a rocket will get faster and faster until its fuel runs out! The third law says: To every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. If I push the wall (and it doesn't fall over) then it is pushing me back with an equal force.

You probably don't use these Laws as equations, but their results are embedded in your subconscious. You knew everything I wrote in the last 8 or 9 lines, but you don't equate your intuitive "tacit" knowledge to Newton's Laws.

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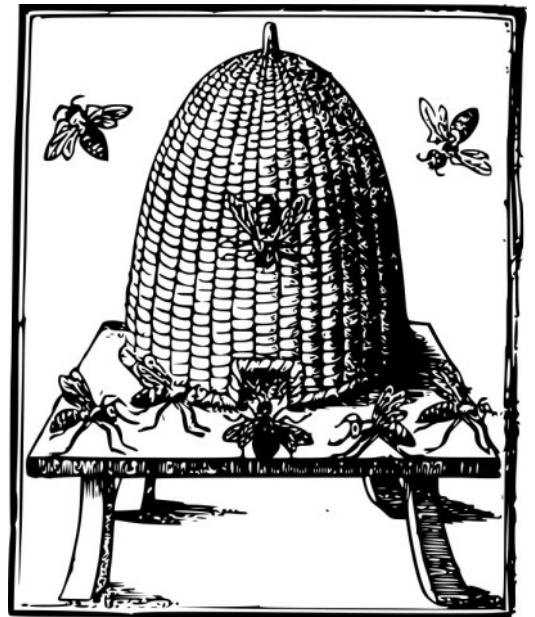
Tuesday Monthly Meeting

Festival Church, Queen Street, Chester, 2pm for 2.30pm start

4th June: Julia Young - All About Beekeeping

Julia Young has been a beekeeper for 13 years and has 10 hives based in Cheshire. She is a member of North Cheshire Beekeepers and trains new beekeepers. Her talk will take you on a whirlwind tour of the life and times of a honeybee and a hobby beekeeper. Expect tales of regicide, sex and violence in the bee hive!

Please note that the meeting will begin with a 5-minute presentation by Michelle Bailey from the Schoolreaders charity, which recruits volunteers to listen to children read in primary schools. Michelle will be available at the end of the meeting to answer questions.



Openclipart

Thursday Monthly Meetings

St Columba's Church Hall, 10.00am for 10.30am start

20th June: Sarah Lewis Newton - The Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine: Past, Present and Future

Founded in 1898, the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM) was the first institution of its kind in the world. As Senior Information Services Manager, Sarah Lewis Newton is custodian to LSTM's rich archives and has access to the stories of the innovators who have worked there through the years. She will be talking about the history of LSTM and its impact today in the global roll-out of scientific breakthroughs, and she will explain how LSTM has reflected on its colonial history to mark its 125th anniversary.

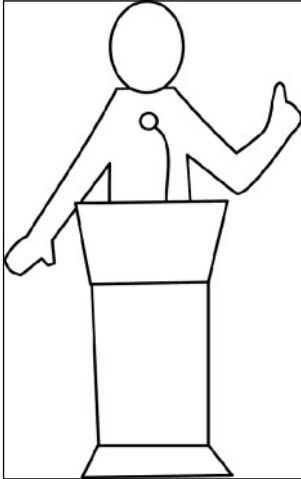


'Laboratory at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine'. Gouache by W.T. Maud, 1899. Source: Wellcome Collection. Licence: Public Domain

Dates for your diaries

Tuesday 2 nd July	The Secret Art of Survival - the Artworks of Far East Prisoners of War
Thursday 18 th July	Chester Zoo - the First 25 years
Tuesday 6 th August	Victorian Workers' Housing
Thursday 15 th August	Robot pet companions for people with dementia
Tuesday 3 rd September	Murder and Mayhem!

Speaker Secretary's Report



Our Membership Secretary, Fran Reading, kindly stepped in to host the Festival Church meeting in May while I was on holiday. Members were treated to a very interesting talk by our chairperson, Peter Goodhew, which covered glass and glass-making in a simple way for non-material scientists, and was beautifully illustrated by

Gwen Goodhew's gorgeous glass collection, of which we are all jealous. Peter did tell us that he is unable to display his 100+ wood-turned items as the house is full of glass!

Peter started with a brief history of glass from the Bronze Age to Pilkington's today. We also learned about the components of glass (including one of Peter's celebrated equations!) and were grateful that he clarified the difference between silica (for glass making) and silicone (for plastic surgery!). Glass is amorphous, meaning non-crystalline, and we learnt that lead crystal glass is actually an incorrect term as it is not crystalline (but does contain lead).

Peter talked about the many types of glass, including decorative coloured glass from Murano, Metglas (a new process for metallic glass alloys), float glass (a 20th-century innovation used in large-scale glass production), tempered glass (illustrated by a fantastic Chinese glass bridge), glass fibres to bring the internet to your home and laminated glass for our windscreens. High temperatures were involved in all processes, and we saw the health and safety needed for glass-makers, particularly when blowing glass. Peter also talked about a very complicated glass-blowing process to make Reticello glass which contains tiny air bubbles, as well as Prince Rupert's drops – a 17th century innovation of exploding glass! Glass is all around us, but decorative glass seems to be a slowly-dying industry, except at the Stourbridge Glass Museum. However, after the talk I am sure that we won't look at glass in the same way again.

At St Columba's, Jean Finney took to the stage (literally!) to tell us about the life of Joyce Grenfell. Joyce was born in 1910 into an upper class family, related to Lady Astor, the first lady Member of Parliament. After completing her education at a finishing school in Paris, Joyce spent one term at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts before marrying the love of her life, Reg Grenfell. As a young married woman, Joyce regularly entertained friends and family with her witty monologues. A theatre producer heard her "perform" at a dinner party about a WI meeting that she had recently attended, and invited her to join his show. This marked the beginning of a professional career that lasted over 30 years, ranging from wartime tours with ENSA (for which she would later be awarded the OBE) to solo stage shows, films such as the St Trinian's series, appearances on TV (including the "Ed Sullivan Show" in the USA) and numerous radio broadcasts.

As Jean demonstrated, Joyce was humorous but not a comedienne. Jean treated us to two very entertaining monologues and a wonderful rendition of Joyce's famous song "Stately as a Galleon", complete with musical accompaniment and quick-fire costume changes. My knowledge of Joyce Grenfell before Jean's talk was limited to her most famous catchphrase "George ... don't do that". After spending an hour in Jean's company, I had a much better insight into this talented, versatile upper class woman and 20th Century icon.

If you have any comments about this month's talks, please feel free to email me at speakersec@chesteru3a.org.uk. And please get in touch if you are interested in helping to plan the future programme and/or would like to get involved on the day (e.g. organizing refreshments, meeting and greeting on the door).

Sue Houghton (Chester u3a Speaker Secretary)

Fran Reading (Chester u3a Membership Secretary)



Social Events

Saturday June 29th Trip to Anglesey

We are planning a trip to Beaumaris, Anglesey. Due to coach availability we are going on a Saturday.

In Beaumaris we will board a boat to go to Puffin Island. This is a bird sanctuary and nesting site for many species of breeding seabirds. Puffins are usually there at this time of year but there are no guarantees!

There is also a resident colony of grey seals. There will be a commentary about the history of Anglesey along the way.

On the boat there will be toilets but no catering facilities. There will be time in Beaumaris for you to buy a snack or alternatively bring your own packed lunch.

Time permitting we hope to stop on the way home, in the picturesque town of Conwy, with its spectacular castle and narrow streets.

Cost: £30

Departure times

Hough Green 9.00

Delamere Street 9.10

Sainsbury's 9.20

If you are interested in this trip please contact:-
Liz on 01244 341097 or Sandra 07818 401526



Popular Science. Our first meeting after Covid took place on Monday 29th April this year. The meeting was well attended with 53 there. (See report on p 5). Thank you to all those that did attend and a special thanks to all who helped to make the meeting successful. We will be holding a further session in the week 16th to 20th September. We will let you know more when we have fully worked out the details, but we can promise you two more interesting talks.



Popular Science, by Mike Pollard

Popular Science moved to a new home in April. The St Marys Handbridge Centre proved a very popular venue for the talks by Sue Foy and Mark Thompson.

Sue's talk on **“Adventures in DNA Testing”** took us on her personal journey to discover new ancestors, brothers and cousins. She described the three types of DNA test popularly sold. The first, a general DNA test, gives details of ancestry accurate to three or four generations. It also gives a host of information about possible relative health risks, eye colouring etc.

If you think you might be related to Richard III or some other ancestral noteworthy then mitochondrial DNA is most useful. This passes down the maternal line and is remarkably stable and easy to trace across the generations. This was the clinching evidence used to confirm the identity of Richard's remains when they were found under the Leicester car park. Richard's known descendants were traced and their mitochondrial DNA was a match.

The third type of DNA test, known as Y-DNA, tests only the Y chromosome which is only present in males.

In conclusion, Sue warned that a DNA test can lead you on your own magical mystery tour – so be prepared for surprises!

Mark Thompson's talk was titled **“How your Home can affect your Health”**. With his background in engineering, he has turned his home into a veritable test bed by using a variety of hand held monitors.

He took us though the kitchen, looking at the particles pushed into the air when we cook. He

focussed on the toaster and burnt toast, then grilling and frying meat products. All produce high levels of particles which are then breathed in by the “chef”. The wood burner in the living room was another source of high levels of potentially damaging particulates within the room as well as those that emerged from the chimney.

Our modern homes are designed to eliminate draughts in the interest of preserving heat. Yet air doesn't hold much heat and is a poor conductor of heat. (Hence the air gap in your double glazing and the air in your duvet).

The recommended number of times air should change in a room is once every two hours. Mark estimated that it would add only six pence to heat this air. He demonstrated the downside of poor air changes by describing the build-up of the carbon dioxide in his office whilst he sat working with the doors and windows closed. The build-up as a result of his exhaling carbon dioxide in a confined space caused progressive lack of concentration, fatigue and sleepiness. His message was to open the trickle vents at the top of your double glazed windows, and open the internal doors to allow the air to move around your home. A door cracked open by three inches works wonders!

The two talks were well received and a straw poll of newcomers to popular science showed they were pitched just right and the messages in each were very clear. Definitely easily understood, non-scary science!!

Our particular thanks and well done to the organisers and speakers for a successful and enjoyable morning.

Supplementary Note:

For harmful pollutant monitoring the best thing to monitor is PM2.5 particulates (not the only pollutant category, but the most harmful and relatively easy to measure). For that Mark Thompson recommends this one <https://tinyurl.com/bp68v23p> It isn't the one he used at the talk, but a cheaper alternative. For CO² monitoring for general wellbeing and alertness this is the one he used at the talk and recommends <https://tinyurl.com/yc2mzrmy>

Whilst these links are to Amazon, we are not recommending them as a source, but they provide a reasonable description.

Wednesday Walking Group, by Ian Cross

One for a rainy day!

What to do when it rains every day, all the paths are at least ankle-deep in mud and your planned walk is impassable? This was the situation faced by the Wednesday walking group in April, on our usual outing in the second week of the month. We had planned a low-lying walk round Warmingham near Nantwich, but days of rain and a dreadful forecast ruled it out. Our (reasonably successful) alternative was to head for the well-drained sandy soils of Bickerton Hill, with an optional extension towards Raw Head.

Just eight hardy souls met up at the start of the walk - a parking spot near Bickerton Church. The walk took us clockwise to the east and then south of Bickerton Hill. This is one of the few remaining lowland heaths in Cheshire and there was some heath regeneration work at the start of the walk, round which we found a detour. The walk then took us to the west of Larkton Hill which we ascended by a fairly steep, but mercifully short path. From the summit we kept to the western edge of the hill, passing the Iron Age fort of Maiden Castle and the memorial which carries the name of Kitty's Stone (see photo).



Normally we would have taken lunch at that point but the rain, though light, was unremitting, and we passed up a number of options to take shelter for lunch (see photo) in order to head back to the cars.



En route we congratulated ourselves on having got out of the house, and at least made something of an unpromising day. However our fortitude did not extend to attempting the optional second leg of the walk, towards Raw Head!

Start point: opposite Bickerton Church

Planned Distance: first leg 4.8 miles, second 2.7 miles (Brunty Bank, towards Raw Head but taking path to the left before the summit, returning via Harthill Lane and Long Lane)

Planned Duration: First leg 2 hours 30 minutes, second 1 hour 30 minutes

Total ascent: First leg 550 feet, second 500 feet

NB: if you wish to repeat the walk please note that the above is not intended to be a step-by-step guide. You should go appropriately equipped, eg with a map, keep to footpaths, and above all check the weather forecast!

Local History, by Tony Barratt

In 2023 we devoted several sessions to researching the workhouses and almshouses of the Chester area. Of particular interest was the resistance in the City to fully adopt the 1830s Poor Law reforms because they would place more restrictions on the Corporation and the Ecclesiastical Parishes who had a number of charters which gave them greater local flexibility in setting the level of provision.

For 2024 we have started looking at the industries in and around Chester, particularly regarding the level of employment they provided. Amongst the industries so far covered are Levers and Port Sunlight, and the railway stations (of which there were about a dozen in the area), including three in close proximity to the city centre. Next time you are on the one remaining station, try looking for a porter – there were about one hundred employed there in 1901.

The April meeting concentrated on Cheshire cheese, including the role the city played in supplying London, a trade which also helped the North Wales lead industry! To ensure we really got our teeth into the subject, the group sampled six of the currently locally produced Cheshire cheeses.

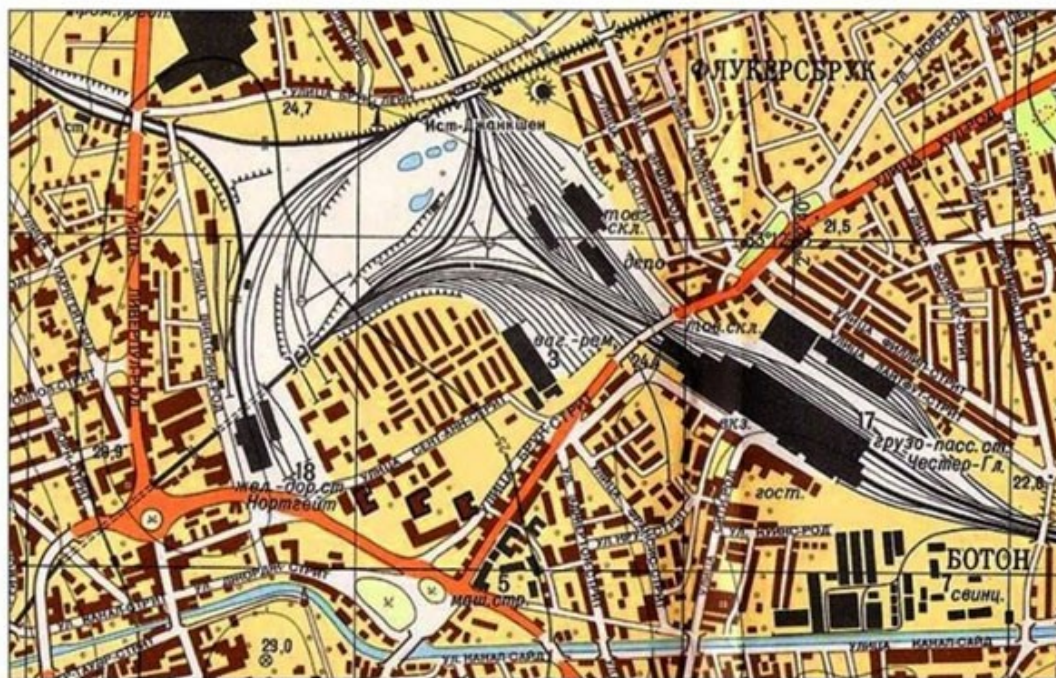
At the May meeting we turned our attention to brewing but unfortunately, as all the big breweries have gone, there was not to be any sampling at that meeting.

The June meeting will be a miscellany of matters, with additional information on some of the subjects covered so far, with a look at two of the smaller businesses of the area. In July we hope to look at the Mid-Cheshire salt industry.

The Chester u3a Local History Group is open to the members of both Chester u3a and Cestrian u3a. It meets at Bowling Green Court in Brook Street on the first Thursday of the month at 2.30 pm. Since Covid there have been 8 - 10 at each meeting but new members will always be welcome. There is a small fee to cover the cost of the room and a cup of tea or coffee.

Pop along and smell the coffee!

If you are interested in joining this group, please email localhistory@chesteru3a.org.uk.



*Chester Station - one of the stations discussed at t recent local history meeting
This is a Kremlin-drawn map of the station, produced in 1969.*

Literary Appreciation, by Graeme Marsden

May meeting introduced by Sue Houghton

Reasons for choosing *Mother's Boy* by Patrick Gale

I like Gale as an author and as an engaging and articulate speaker: at Storyhouse he explained how he turned the life of the Cornish poet Charles Causley into *Mother's Boy*. This novel also continues a thread from Causley's most famous poem, *Timothy Winters*, which was read in our poetry session last year.

About the author

Gale was born on the Isle of Wight in 1962, the youngest of four children. He was a chorister at Winchester College before going to Oxford to read English. He claims to have never had a "proper job", supporting his early career through temporary roles including being a singing waiter. He lives on a farm near Land's End with his sculptor husband.

Background to *Mother's Boy*

In *Mother's Boy*, his 17th and most recent novel, Gale uses fiction, based on intensive research, to fill the gaps in the known facts of the life of Causley and his mother, Laura. As a patron of the *Charles Causley Trust*, Gale was passionate about getting Causley's poems read by a wider audience. It would be disingenuous to suppose that he had no suspicion that Causley was homosexual, as there were rumours to that effect, but he approached his research with an open mind. He spoke to people who knew him, deciphered his tiny diaries, and read letters that survived his "filing system" (a compost heap of paper in a leaky shed). As one letter was crucial to understanding Causley's sexuality, Gale incorporates it as a key plot point into his story about a man living a long, successful life but hiding his true self.

Synopsis

The book starts in 1914 when Charles's parents meet, and ends in 1948, when Charles is living with his widowed mother. Charles's childhood is told as a sequence of vignettes, some minor, all significant - his father's death from TB; breaking his glasses in a playground fight; playing the piano inside with an audience of captivated children outside. Meanwhile, Laura's life is presented as endless chores of

cleaning and doing laundry for other people to give Charles the best upbringing she can, but at the same time stifling his ambition. Having grown up to be an intensely private adult, Charles signs up for the navy as a coder. This proves to be the perfect environment for secretly writing poetry, as he can polish lines in his head with one part of his brain, while coding with another. After a friendly shipmate, Cushty, saves his life in a bomb blast, they spend one intimate night together, then part. The book then skips to 1944 with Charles training coders and engaged in an affair with an officer, Bucknall, which ends badly. Charles later writes to Bucknall, and Gale uses the letter that he retrieved from Causley's shed as Bucknall's reply: this letter refers to all the fun they had together and asks for no further contact because he's now a married man who's put all that behind him.

The book concludes with Charles getting a surprise visit from Cushty but, despite the offered possibility of a relationship, Charles rejects him. Gale imagines this final episode from Causley's poem *Angel Hill*, the name of the lane behind Causley's home, *Cyprus Well*. Asked why he never wrote his memoir, he replied that it was all in the poems, hence Gale's thesis in *Mother's Boy* is that *Angel Hill* lays out, in plain sight, the life Causley kept very private.

Themes for discussion

Although Gale uses different settings and scenarios for his books, there are common themes.

- Gale is interested in memory and the legacy of things that happen in childhood.
- His books often look at events from the perspectives of different characters in shifting timelines.
- By undertaking intensive research, his stories are rich in small, accurate details. Hence Laura's story is imagined from events in Launceston during the war, with evacuees, POWs and the racism experienced by black GIs.
- Gale's books have a strong sense of place: he visited places mentioned in *Mother's Boy* and stayed in *Cyprus Well*.
- Whilst his novels are informed by his own sexuality, it would be wrong to pigeonhole him as a writer of gay fiction as he works hard to understand people, like Charles and Laura, and treat them equally with compassion and empathy.

Schoolreaders

improving literacy • increasing life chances



Volunteers Needed to Listen to Children Read in Chester Schools



As Schoolreaders celebrates its tenth year, we're on the lookout for volunteers who are passionate about nurturing a love for reading among children in primary schools in Chester.

Schoolreaders is a national charity which helps to improve children's literacy by providing volunteers to listen to children read in primary schools on a one-to-one basis. Schoolreaders mission is provide every child with the opportunity to learn to read well and in so doing, increase their future life-chances. Over the past decade, Schoolreaders volunteers have provided more than 2 million one-to-one reading sessions, to over 80,000 children.

The support Schoolreaders offers has never been more needed, as statistics reveal that 1 in 4 children leave primary school without reaching the expected reading standard, which means they cannot fully access their secondary education, which will limit their future opportunities. There is therefore an urgent need for more volunteers to make a difference.

Schoolreaders volunteers commit to spending a minimum of one hour per week for a year during term time listening to children read in primary school. The impact of this commitment is measurable: 81% of children supported by our volunteers showed improvement in their reading fluency, 91% displayed a boost in reading confidence, and 84% were found to take greater enjoyment in reading.

Our dedicated volunteers also serve as mentors and role models within the school community.

To learn more about Schoolreaders and how you can get involved, visit www.schoolreaders.org

Apply now to become a volunteer and help to change a child's life-story. Volunteers will be matched with a primary school in their area. No qualifications are necessary, just a good level of English. All volunteers will undertake a mandatory enhanced DBS check and safeguarding training.

Join us in spreading the joy of reading and building brighter futures for local children. Together, we can make a lasting impact on children, families, and communities.



From Our Readers

David Harrison would like to share the details of his new Facebook Group "Space Exploration Group UK". Its long-term aim is to collaborate with a number of UK companies and institutions with the aim of launching a UK-based space telescope into low earth orbit by 2030. The only requirement in joining the group is an interest and enthusiasm for the project. Any help from the u3a would be much appreciated.

David gave a talk to the u3a Science group on the 11th April on the "History of the Telescope" which was well attended and well received. The Facebook link is : <https://www.facebook.com/groups/352489914490452/>.

David Jarvis wants to 'thank the hardworking people' helping to run Chester u3a, with a special mention for the Chair, Peter Goodhew. He says, 'They are worthy of more support from all of us groundlings'.

(Editor's Note: David originally submitted a long article with lots of detail, but he later asked for it to be cut down to simply expressing his thanks.)

Schedule of Groups to help at Monthly Meetings

We would hope that groups will cooperate in providing help to the volunteers who are already working hard to facilitate our two monthly meetings. However, in an emergency situation, please email committee@chesteru3a.org.uk so that all members of the committee are aware of the need to provide additional cover.

	Festival Church	St Columba's
June	Tuesday 4th Science	Thursday 20th Tuesday Walking
July	Tuesday 2nd Table Tennis	Thursday 18th Ukulele 1 Ukulele 2

The cut-off date for the next Chester Times is Thursday 20th June 2024.

Please send contributions to: chestertimes@chesteru3a.org.uk or: PO Box 167 Chester CH1 9FB.

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