



Chester Times

May 2026

u3a learn,
laugh,
live
Chester

Message from Fran Reading, Chair

I recently attended an event at Storyhouse as part of the Elders monthly meetings. It was a musical trivia quiz, led by Peter Fox from a walking group set up 20 years ago in Hoole, and featured tunes from Peter's specialist subject - music from 1955 to 1969. Unfortunately, having only been born in 1962, I knew very few of the answers so wasn't much help, but we had a great morning trying to recognise long-forgotten tunes and artists – there was even a bit of humming along! It made me think how important music is in our lives. Whether listening to the radio, watching operas, joining a dance class or enjoying a film – music is often the background to our lives, bringing happy memories of times past.

Last month I watched a video of my dad reciting a poem he had written for my brother's 40th birthday, 34 years ago. Thanks to my brother-in-law, who has recently converted all his old video tapes to computer, we can now enjoy past family events on screen. My Dad's skill was writing poems and pantomimes in rhyming couplets, and he could definitely come up with more rhymes than the rest of us. I also watched me and my twin at the same event reciting our version of a poem for Phil, our brother – very eerie seeing yourself so long ago, and looking at what we wore then, and how big our glasses were!

Recently I attended two regional u3a events; one was a NW u3a network meeting to identify if there were opportunities to network with other u3a's

(just like our science group do), and the second event was a NW u3a training day where we talked finance and membership with new ideas and approaches for your committee to think about. If you have any ideas about how to take Chester u3a forward, let me know or ask about joining the committee!!

I successfully completed my History group talk in March on 'The History of the Pocket', as part of our invention's series, and am now researching Joan of Arc as part of our History of France talks later in the year. It is fascinating to see how different researchers approach the topic, and the emphasis they place on different aspects of her life. When asked, most people can remember that she had visions, successfully ended the siege of Orleans and was burned at the stake, but not much else, so hopefully I will be able to fill in some gaps. 30th May is the day she is celebrated as patron saint of France.

For a bit of exercise and fun I went around the walls with some friends to complete the Chester Times April quiz. We managed to find all the locations in the photos and it certainly put us in the mood for the Heritage Festival later in May. Looking up, down and around definitely gets you to see Chester in a different light. There are more Treasure Trails on the Chester u3a website if you're now hooked.

Enjoy the sunshine this month.

Contents

Monthly Meetings	2	Spanish Conversation	7
A Member Remembers	3	Walking Cricket	7
Report on April Monthly Meetings	4	Walking Tennis	7
Events During May 2026	5	BorrowBox	8
The Queen Anne Statue	5	Monthly Quiz	8
Local History	6	April and May Quiz Answers	9
		Schedule of Group Helpers	10



Tuesday May 5th

Chester Picturehouse, 2.00 pm for 2.30pm start

Brian Groom: These Isles: The Fascinating Story of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales

Bestselling author Brian Groom will give us an entertaining sweep through the entwined histories of Britain and Ireland's nations – and the people who have called them home. Based on his new book, Brian will reveal a colourful and often-contested story of the Celts, Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Vikings, Normans and others who have occupied these islands, along with their culture, languages and passions. He will explore the role of religion and the British Empire, international diasporas and internal migration, gender relations and war - and outline how Chester fits into the story.



[Boudica, Queen of the Iceni - Charles Hamilton Smith \(Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons\)](#)

Thursday May 21st

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

Simon Michael: My Life in Crime - Part 2

By popular demand, Simon Michael returns to give us more fascinating tales from the Bar. Simon practised as a barrister for 37 years, working at the Old Bailey and other criminal courts, defending and prosecuting a wide selection of murderers, armed robbers, con artists and other assorted villains, and gathering enough real-life stories to populate an entire series of crime fiction. He has established a reputation as 'the British John Grisham' for his legal thriller series, featuring his antihero barrister, Charles Holborne, an East End villain made good, battling the prejudices of the 1960s, the Kray twins and the corrupt Metropolitan Police. The books – and Simon's talk – draw from the headlines of the day, the criminal cases in which Simon was instructed and his own family history.



Simon Michael

Dates for your diaries

Our [website](#) shows lots of exciting talks scheduled for 2026. Have a browse and make a note of anything that interests you. If you have any suggestions, please email speakersec@chesteru3a.org.uk.

A Member Remembers May 2026

Fran Reading in conversation with Dave Adams

I know very little about my family tree, so it was fascinating talking to Dave about the research he has been doing with his son Rob and daughter-in-law Brid. He explained that some people only want to log up as many names as possible and to see how far back they can go, whereas he was interested in the stories and the social history. Fortunately, there weren't any scandals, as you see on 'Who do you think you are'! His research has taken him all over the country and even led him to become a published author – "The Revolt and Taming of the Ignorant – A Study of the Bircham Riots 1835 and their aftermath". It was shortlisted for a book award and he even did a signing!

He was born in Buxton and lived there before going to Bangor University to study French and German, having always had an aptitude for languages. He met his wife Iona there where she was doing her history degree and they married in Bangor Cathedral in 1968. It was a four-year course, and during the holidays Dave spent some time in Buxton, including working in an ice-cream shop where he was entrusted with the secret family recipe (still has it today!). He also travelled to France (Grenoble) and Germany (Tübingen) to build his language skills.

On leaving university he became a language teacher (no PGCE needed then) and worked for two years at Newcastle-under-Lyme High School. He later moved to Queens Park High and then Malpas where he was Head of Department. Having realised that he really enjoyed teaching sixth formers he moved to Dunstable College, living away during the week, before moving back to Chester to be with his family. His final position was at Birkenhead Sixth Form College. In the 1970's and 1980's he was very involved with the Modern Languages Association (now defunct), organising several Festivals of Languages locally as well as being National Chairman circa 1990.

He had many a story of foreign exchanges, trips to France with large groups of school children, the torment of not being quite sure how to cope with emotional teenagers and, before the internet, trying to work out how to charter a plane! Iona was a teacher as well and later found out that she

had a special aptitude for home-tutoring, particularly with poorly students and SEND pupils.

When semi-retired Dave developed an interest in local and family history, after being given the family bible and his Grandparents' wedding certificate. He travelled to the National Archives to do further research, as well as visiting record offices in Yorkshire and Norfolk. He also completed a DNA test and discovered his Yorkshire background.

Bell-ringing has been a lifelong interest from Buxton to Chester and all areas in-between. He discovered at university that he had little sporting ability, being the captain of a table tennis team and losing all the games! Bellringing seemed like a good way to meet people and keep physically and mentally fit – it still does. Dave has spoken at the u3a local history group about Chester bells, and how the teacher in him helps with training new bellringers. He still rings at the Cathedral as well as Handbridge and Hoole. Since 1989 he has also been the archivist for the Chester Diocesan Guild of Bellringers.

He visits Iona in her care home every day, but still finds time for u3a (local history, pickleball and reading), Hoole Community Centre Over 55's, a group in Hoole called Mentell, International Coffee Mornings at Hoole Library and a men's walking group., Dave's attitude is to try new things and if you like them continue; if not, then nothing is lost. He is a great asset to Chester u3a.



With the Duke of Gloucester last May when he returned to the bell-tower he opened in June 1975. On the day of the opening the then Dean, George Addleshaw, named all 13 bells, each of which was rung six times. Dave rang no. 3.



Report on the April Monthly Meetings, by Diane Williams

For our first meeting in April, Chester u3a member Ian Hymes gave a fascinating talk entitled *Aspects of Old Chester*. Originally a Chartered Chemical Engineer at Shell, Ian became a Freeman of Chester in 2005. He has long taken an interest in the city's history and is a regular speaker on the subject.

He began with a teaser question: what prompted the Duke of Wellington to remark, "By God, Cotton, I never saw anything so beautiful in my life"? The answer, we were told, would come later.

After recounting the story of Chester's cattle markets, Ian moved on to the focus of his talk: three Chester soldiers who fought in the Peninsular War. The first was one of his own ancestors, Thomas Hand, born in 1782, who fought at Badajoz in 1812. There he was so seriously wounded that he was discharged, but despite his injuries he lived until 1833.

The second soldier was Thomas Gould, whose grave lies in the centre of the roundabout in front of the castle, near the equestrian statue of Lord Combermere. After leaving the army in 1819, he later became custodian of the public baths at the age of 57. He died of bronchitis in 1865.

The third, and most famous, was Stapleton Cotton, 1st Viscount Combermere, who commanded Wellington's cavalry during the Peninsular War. At Salamanca, Cotton led a decisive cavalry charge that broke the French lines and helped secure a major victory. It was while witnessing this charge that Wellington made his famous remark.

Alongside quiet murmurings of "Oh, I remember that!" at the sight of some of Ian's old photographs, there was plenty of laughter at the humorous anecdotes woven throughout the talk.

"How often do you lie?" "Can you tell when other people are lying?" These were two of the challenging questions that Dr Clea Wright put to us at our second meeting in April during her talk,

Deception: Can We Tell? A confident and lively speaker, Clea is a Senior Lecturer in Investigative and Forensic Psychology at the University of Chester.

After defining deception as the deliberate control of information to manipulate the beliefs, emotions or psychological state of others, Clea went on to outline four main reasons why we lie. Perhaps the most obvious are material gain and avoidance of punishment, but there are also two very common motivations that might be described as "white lies": avoiding upsetting someone and making oneself appear better than one really is. Taking these into account, research suggests that people lie on average once or twice a day, though it is difficult to collect accurate data as this relies on self-reporting.

In answer to Clea's second question, our accuracy rate in detecting lies is apparently only 54%. One of the most reliable indicators, particularly when someone is describing a sad situation, is facial expression: genuine sadness involves the eyebrows being drawn together and raised at the inner corners, an expression that is very difficult to simulate.

Polygraphs were developed on the assumption that liars experience stress or anxiety when lying, leading to physical responses such as a rise in vocal pitch, sweating and an increased heart rate. However, these reactions can occur in any stressful situation, making polygraphs unreliable and prone to false positives. A more effective technique is to ask unanticipated questions. In response, liars may hesitate, resist answering, respond with further questions, speak more slowly than usual, or repeat words and details.

At the end of the session, many hands shot up to ask questions - always a sign of a well-received talk. Those wishing to hear more from Clea might like to explore her podcast, *Psychology of ...*, produced with two of her colleagues and available on Spotify.



Events during May 2026

Grosvenor Museum – 8th May, 2.30-4pm. Come and join the Museum Book club on the second Friday of the month – open to anyone who likes to read and chat about stories and books. They are beginning with novels which have a historical theme. Tea and coffee will be provided. A £3 donation is suggested. The book we are reading for May is **The Book Thief by Markus Zusak**

Riverside Museum (open 1-4pm) and talk in the Wheeler Building – Wednesday 6th May, refreshments from 4pm – ‘From Far and Wide’, Health and Social Care Workers from Overseas. The University Choir are also hoping to perform part of ‘Wings of the Sky’ by Matt Baker.

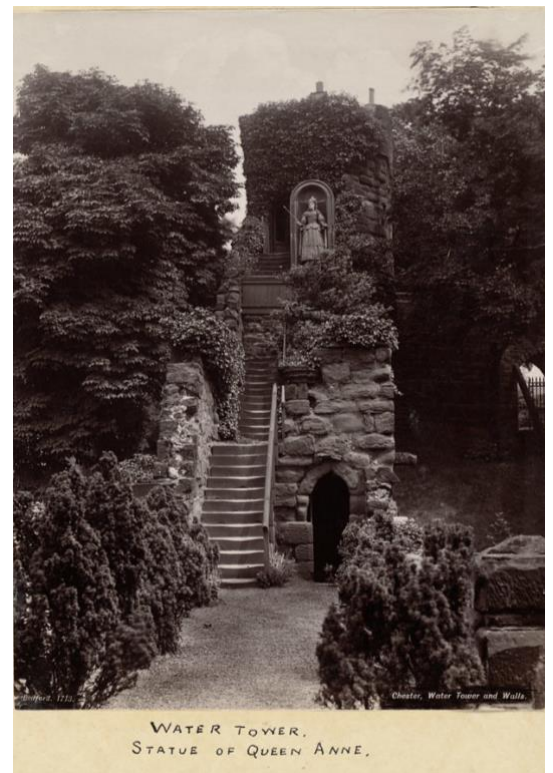
Chester Cathedral – 8th May to 28th June 2026; Experience a breathtaking journey through the story of creation, redemption and revelation in a remarkable exhibition by textile artist Jacqui Parkinson. Ten years in the making and composed of more than 25 million stitches across 44 panels, this is one of the largest textile artworks ever created by a single artist. Together the panels stretch over 80 metres, weaving scenes of beauty, faith and hope with colour and creativity on an awe-inspiring scale.

23rd May to 7th June 2026 - Chester Heritage Festival coming soon - check out details at Heritage Chester!

Whatever happened to the Queen Anne Statue? – from Tom Welsh

At the end of the recent lecture by Ian Hymes, pictures were shown of the missing Queen Anne statue, which formerly adorned the Exchange, until it burned down in 1862, and then stood at the top of the steps overlooking the link to the Water Tower. The statue was toppled by vandals in 1948, and it lay for two years at the bottom of the steps. The City Surveyor’s Department took it away to repair it, but it was too far damaged (Chester Chronicle 8th April 1950 p10). However, no-one knows if the pieces are preserved anywhere, or it is just lost.

It was cut from a single block of sandstone, bolted to the tower wall, and it must have taken some effort to topple it. She was displayed in her coronation robes, though her orb and sceptre had been lost a century before, and there was other damage. The lower part survived the fall, but the head, completely severed, was broken into pieces, and though a search was made some pieces were not found. This suggests desecration rather than accidental damage. Queen Anne reigned from 1702 to 1714, the last Stuart monarch, daughter of James II.



Water Tower - Statue of Queen Anne Boston Public Library CCBY2.0



Local History, by Fran Reading

We weren't sure if we really wanted to listen to a talk about cock-fighting or bull-baiting, but we had a fascinating presentation by Dave Adams about just these topics as part of our 2026 Local History group talks on **Leisure in Chester's Past**. Who knew that there was a cock-fighting pit in Upton (see below), or that Chester used to 'celebrate' the change of Mayor with a bull-bait at the Cross. Thank goodness that is now part of Chester's past!



[Cock-Fighting Pit at Upton](#)

This year so far, under the leisure theme, we have also enjoyed talks about 'Boating in Chester' and 'Mystery Plays and Parades'.

The Chester Mystery Plays is a cycle of [mystery plays](#) dating back to at least the early part of the 15th century. In the 16th century they were banned by the Church of England during the reign of Elizabeth I for "[Popery](#)". Chester was the last to concede in 1578 and so ours became the longest-running cycle in medieval times. It was revived in 1951 for the Festival of Britain, and they have since been staged every five years.



[Chester Mystery Plays](#)

Still to come this year are talks about 'Marketing Chester as a Tourist City', 'Libraries and Literature', 'Chester Zoo', 'Roodee and Racing' and 'The Grosvenor Hotel'.

We try to make the meetings as interactive as possible with one member leading the talk with a presentation, but there is lots of time for comments, stories and questions as well as a cup of tea! Even if you think you know about Chester's history there is always more to learn. We meet at Bowling Green Court on the first Thursday of the month at 2.30pm. If you fancy joining us, email [Local History](#) via the Chester u3a website.



[Bithell's Boats](#)



Three New Groups

Spanish Conversation Group, by Roger Eagle

We want to improve our ability to chat in Spanish, improving vocabulary and confidence, but not worrying too much about grammar- enjoying the language and learning a bit about the Hispanic way of life.

We meet at the bus station café in Chester.

First and third Monday of the month, from 11:45 to 13:15

To find out more, contact Roger Eagle via [Spanish Conversation](#) on the Groups page of our website .



Spanish Dancers

Walking Cricket, by Stewart Norton

We are hoping to start a walking cricket group. Games are 8 a-side and 16 overs per innings on a reduced playing area.

Each player bats for 4 overs and bowls 2 overs. We play with plastic bats and balls, so no specialist equipment is needed.

If you are interested, then please contact the leader of [Social Golf](#).



Walking Tennis, by Roger Eagle

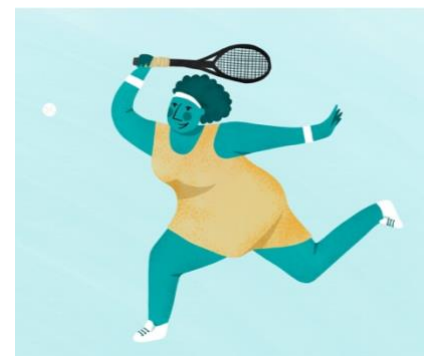
Not intended to be too competitive, just enjoyable.

Walking Tennis follows most standard tennis rules but players must walk, not run, and keep one foot on the ground at all times. The ball can bounce twice. Serving can be underarm.

Free to play at the municipal courts in Alexandra Park, Hoole. (Also available at Westminster Park or Whitney Park, Ellesmere Port).

The courts are in good condition, and can't be booked, you just turn up and play if available.

If interested, contact Roger via this [Walking Tennis](#) link, and we could have a trial session.





BorrowBox, by Gwen Goodhew

Did you know that you can access eBooks, eAudiobooks, eMagazines and eNewspapers free of charge at home using BorrowBox?

I explored it this week for the first time and, being a news junky, I went to eNewspapers and was able to read not only our local Chester Chronicle and national papers but also The Washington Post and other newspapers from around the world. Meanwhile, my husband went to eMagazines and found The New Scientist -only one of a vast range of magazines with everything from Hello and The Radio Times to Big Rigs and Home and Gardens.

In eAudiobooks and eBooks there are titles for adults and children, both fact and fiction including a range of comics and graphic novels.

Storyhouse is part of the BorrowBox scheme. If you have a library card, all you have to do is download the BorrowBox App, enter your library card number and password and you are admitted to a world of free reading without cluttering your home with more books and paper.



Chester u3a Monthly Quiz

These people all have strong links with Chester. Who are they?

1. Which former health secretary attended King's School, Chester?
2. What is Diane Beck's claim to fame and how is she linked to Chester
3. Who visited Chester during her affair with the second Duke of Westminster?
4. Who are these two men? What did they do and what are their links to Chester



5. Which influential financial journalist attended King's School, Chester?
6. Which broadcaster, author and entertainer was MP for Chester from 1992-1997?
7. Which Queen's School girl became the first female gymnast from Great Britain to win a medal at the European Championships, World Championships and Olympic Games?
8. Who was born in Chester in 1968 and is best known for his role in films based on the books of Ian Fleming?
9. A Queens' girl who became the longest serving female Labour MP for a Welsh constituency.
10. A British journalist and broadcaster. She is best known for her work in the North West of England as a main anchor of the ITV regional news programme, *Granada Reports* between 1988 and 2024. She spent much of her childhood on Chester.



Answers to Aprils' Picture Quiz

1. Phoenix Tower (King Charles Tower)
2. Mosaic in Roman Gardens
3. Park Street. Parish boundary markers on the 'Nine Houses'. (Only six of these former alms houses remain). SOP is St Olave's Parish, SOM is St Michael's
4. Plaque outside the former Royal Infirmary
5. Park Street (building next to the 'Nine Houses')
6. HSBC Bank, near Eastgate
7. Roman South-East Angle Tower
8. House gable on Water Tower Street
9. Roman hypocaust (reconstructed) in the Roman Gardens
10. Building at the racecourse
11. Cheshire Cat, on the wall to the east of Bridgegate
12. Pemberton's Parlour (Goblin Tower)
13. In a garden to the west of the Northgate (looking north)
14. Mosaic at the entrance to the Roman Gardens (this photo was taken from the walls, looking through trees, so it may be a bit obscure!)
15. On the inn sign for The Architect on Nuns Road
16. Water Tower Street, on the side wall of the Liverpool Arms
17. Bonewaldesthorne's Tower (attached by a spur wall to the Water Tower)
18. Blocked doorway overlooking Abbey Green, east of the Northgate
19. Eastgate clock
20. Albion Pub, Park Street
21. 'Books on the Walls' near Northgate

Answers to May's Quiz

1. Matt Hancock
2. The world's first female neurosurgeon, who was brought up in Hoole.
3. Coco Chanel
4. The conductor [Sir Adrian Boult](#) (National Portrait Gallery CC BY-NC-ND 3.0) was born in Chester.
Thomas Brassey- Railway engineer – born just outside Chester and attended King's School.
5. Martin Lewis
6. Gyles Brandreth
7. Beth Tweddle
8. Daniel Craig
9. Ann Clwyd
10. Lucy Meacock



Schedule for Groups to Help at Monthly Meetings

We 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, please email committee@chesteru3a.org.uk so that all members of the committee are aware of the need to provide additional cover.

You are very welcome to use these sessions as an opportunity to seek new members or promote your activities by bringing along flyers or photographs, setting up a stand or even asking if you can take a few minutes to talk to the whole group.

Chester Picturehouse at 2.00		St Columba's at 10.00am
May	Tuesday 5th Spanish Intermediate	Thursday 21st Table tennis 1 & 2
June	Tuesday 2nd Thursday Strollers	Thursday 18^h Tuesday & Wednesday Walking

The cut-off date for the next Chester Times is Wednesday 20th May 2026.

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

This month's editor: Gwen Goodhew Next month's editor: Joyce Carrington

Contacts

Chair: Fran Reading: chair@chesteru3a.org.uk

Membership: Liz Eccleston: members@chesteru3a.org.uk

Website: www.chesteru3a.u3asite.uk

Postal address: PO Box 167 Chester CH1 9FB.

Reg. Charity 1048416