



Chester Times

June 2026



Message from Fran Reading, Chair

Have you had a lightbulb moment? This question was sparked by my recent visit to see an exhibition by this name at the Victoria Gallery and Museum in Liverpool. This red-brick building, opened in 1887, was the second site of the University (then a college) in Liverpool. It contained administration offices, a lecture theatre, lecture rooms, staff offices, common rooms (including one for ladies) and the Tate Library, which was designed to hold 80,000 volumes.

In the early years women made up over half the day students, which was very high for the time. They were often called 'New Women' because they were pushing for reform in education and careers. The accompanying Lightbulb Moments talk was very interesting, telling us about early instruments, terrestrial and celestial globes and astrolabes.

I also took advantage of being in the university precincts to complete the VG&M Sculpture Trail. Who knew that hidden behind the buildings there are sculptures by Dame Barbara Hepworth, Elisabeth Frink, Maxwell Fry and many more? We were the only people stopping to look at artworks – perhaps that is typical of our everyday lives – too busy going to places to stop, have a look up, down and around, and to see what is happening in our locality.



Lettering, 1960 by Maxwell Fry OBE (1899-1987)



Square with Two Circles, 1964, by Dame Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975)

Talking about looking around, by the time you read this I shall have led one walk on the Chester Heritage Festival and am gearing up to do my second. I like to give something back to the city, and I enjoy the research. However, I can't wait for the new Archive to open to make sure all my facts are correct! Have a look at the Heritage Chester website for more information about the remaining festival activities.

Enjoy our beautiful city!

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Tuesday 2nd June

Picturehouse, 2pm for 2.30pm

Tina Saunders: Needles and Sparkles

Tina has over 20 years' experience in all things thread and fabric-related. She completed a three-year apprenticeship at the Royal School of Needlework, receiving the best training in all aspects of hand embroidery. This was the beginning of a fascinating career. Tina went on to work for Jimmy Choo Couture and the Jim Henson Workshop, amongst many others, and in 2009 she had the honour of being asked to work for the Royal Household at Buckingham Palace. Tina is now the chief stitcher, designer, tutor and coffee maker at *Needles and Sparkles*. She creates bespoke pieces and can turn your high street outfit into a one-off (or teach you how to!).



Thursday 18th June

St Columba's Church Hall, 10am for 10.30 start

David Mottram: Eastham's Victorian Pleasure Gardens - A Journey Back in Time

Eastham Woods was the location of an extensive Victorian pleasure gardens between the 1840s and the 1920s. In this talk, David will take us on a journey through the woods and we will learn what remarkable attractions were on offer to visitors, particularly on ferry boat trips from Liverpool. Attractions included floral and zoological gardens, circus acts, such as the tightrope walker Blondin (who had walked across Niagara Falls), a boating lake, a water chute and a loop-the-loop railway. He will also describe what evidence of these attractions still remain, such as the famous Bear Pit.



The Eastham Victorian Pleasure Gardens Bear Pit

Dates for your diaries

Our [website](#) now 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 for the 2026 programme, please email speakersec@chesteru3a.org.uk.



Report on the May Monthly Meetings, by Diane Williams and Fran Reading

Under the title *These Isles: A People's History of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales*, our first speaker of the month, Brian Groom, attempted the ambitious task of covering 900,000 years of British history in an hour. The talk drew on his third book of the same name; Groom is a retired journalist who spent most of his career at the *Financial Times*.

With such a wide topic, it was inevitable that most aspects of our history received only brief mention, but three were explored in a little more detail. The first was the story of Mary, Queen of Scots. As a great-granddaughter of Henry VII, Mary had once claimed the English throne, and her cousin Elizabeth I saw her as a threat. She was eventually executed in 1587, an event which Brian described in vivid detail.

The second theme was migration, both into and out of Britain. As Brian noted, the populations of the four nations have been shaped by successive waves of immigration. Emigration, meanwhile, was driven partly by opportunities within the British Empire - which at its height encompassed almost a quarter of the world's population and land area - and partly by poverty, particularly in Ireland. US President John F. Kennedy famously remarked: 'Ireland has had only one export, and that is its people.'. Twenty-three US presidents have had Irish heritage, including Barack Obama and Joe Biden.

The third focus was popular culture, illustrated through comedians who performed at the Glasgow Empire Theatre, which became known as 'the English comic's grave' for those whose act proved too slow for its lively, and often demanding, audiences. Even Morecambe and Wise were not immune.

Our second meeting in May, with Simon Michael, took us into the world of London's law chambers, giving some fascinating insights into behind-the-scenes activities for new barristers. He explained that if you had attended a public school or Oxford, the rituals in Middle Temple were probably the norm, but for a working-class East End lad who had a holiday job as a road-sweeper, he found many of the practices unusual. These included having to eat 36 meals in Temple in very formal surroundings in order to practice law, not using first names or titles, so he always caused confusion asking to be referred to as Michael, and not handing out business cards as that was seen as touting!

As well as the law we found out the origin of Friday 13th, 'called to the bar', 'cup-boards' from the Golden Hind wooden table and an altercation involving a barrister's outfit, a dash to get his 36th meal and a car incident with Michael Palin. Taking part in your pupillage seemed very complicated and so much, as in life, depends on the mentors you have at work. His first was poor, but his second pupil-master seemed brilliant and even led to Simon's brief appearance at the back of Old Bailey Court 1, waving at his unfortunate friend who had just spent time in the evidence cupboard - you had to be there to hear the story!

Getting cases seemed complicated and you had to be in favour with the clerks in chambers. Having prosecuted and defended murderers, armed robbers and con artists, Simon decided to leave the profession, where he had been a successful clinical negligence lawyer, and take up writing novels full-time. In these he now includes stories from many cases including the Kray twins and the Profumo affair. Read his books, including his Charles Holbourne series.

Bus Buddies

We've received notice that the Bus Buddies group is going into hibernation during the summer. This is because of unforeseen circumstances interfering with the Group Leaders' work.

Open Walk: The Wirral Way – Friday 12th June, by Jeff Howard

Last year the Friday Walkers arranged an open walk along the Baker Way with an invitation to all members of Chester u3a to join us. This year we are also holding an open walk in June, along the Wirral Way. Many of you will be familiar with the Wirral Way and some of you may have walked parts of it, maybe the whole of it, before. Still, come and join us.

The Wirral Way follows the trackbed of part of the former Birkenhead Railway route from Hooton to West Kirby. The old line was closed in 1962. The Wirral Way is a well-maintained flat path about 20km long.

We shall be walking from Hooton to West Kirby and taking the train back from West Kirby. You can meet at either Chester or Hooton station, whichever is most convenient for you.

The walk is open to all members of Chester u3a and guests.

Contact me at '[Friday Walkers](#)' through the website and I will send you details and times before the walk. (If you are in the Friday Walkers, I will be sending this information to you as part of our regular walking programme.)



*Photo taken at Neston railway cutting on the former Hooton to West Kirby railway line..
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Chester u3a Monthly Quiz (Answers on p10)

The words or phrases after each number are definitions or descriptions of those numbers. Only the initial letters have been given, with a space for each missing letter.



An example could be: 5280 f _ _ _ i _ a m _ _ _ The answer would be 5280 feet in a mile. Please try to fill in the gaps.

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 1) 13 | A b _ _ _ _ ' _ d _ _ _ _ |
| 2) 7 | P _ _ _ _ _ o _ W _ _ _ _ _ |
| 3) 147 | m _ _ _ _ _ b _ _ _ _ i _ s _ _ _ _ _ |
| 4) 20,000 | l _ _ _ _ _ u _ _ _ _ t _ _ s _ _ |
| 5) 50 | s _ _ _ _ _ i _ t _ _ U _ _ _ _ S _ _ _ _ _ |
| 6) 6 | w _ _ _ _ o _ H _ _ _ _ t _ _ E _ _ _ _ _ |
| 7) 1688 | d _ _ _ o _ t _ _ G _ _ _ _ _ R _ _ _ _ _ |
| 8) 52 | p _ _ _ _ c _ _ _ _ i _ a p _ _ _ |
| 9) 2001 | A S _ _ _ O _ _ _ _ _ |
| 10) 366 | d _ _ _ i _ a l _ _ _ y _ _ _ |

Chester u3a Day Trips

National Arboretum and Lichfield (16th June)

Enjoy a day out in Staffordshire visiting the National Memorial Arboretum and Lichfield. The cost is £29.00.



Pontcysyllte Aqueduct with Ploughman's Lunch (19th July)

This includes a two-hour cruise across the aqueduct where you will be served a ploughman's lunch. The cost is £49.00

Both trips are arranged through JONES.

To book you must contact JONES on **01352 733292** and ask about the trips arranged with Chester u3a. Places on both trips are limited to 48 and allocated on a first-come-first-served basis.



The Social Committee. social@chesteru3a.org.uk

(Images taken from Wikipedia)

Events during June

Chester Heritage Festival continues to 7th June, so check out the Heritage Chester website

Grosvenor Museum – 20th June to 20th September. Echoes of Ancient Lands and Seas: Fossils from Cheshire: An exhibition exploring the geological history of Cheshire and its surrounding areas, following the region as it changed from jungle to desert to tropical seas. Discover different environments and the strange and unusual creatures that inhabited them, using fossilised remains to understand the world they lived in and what kinds of lives they led.

Riverside Museum, Wednesday 3rd June, (open 1–4pm) followed by a talk in the Wheeler Building – refreshments from 4pm – ‘Less than Splendid Isolation: An Exploration of the Rise and Demise of England’s Fever Hospitals by Professor Elizabeth Mason-Whitehead.

Midsummer Watch Parade 20th & 21st June, 2pm. leaving from Town Hall Square: an ancient and colourful parade, featuring a 4-metre-high family of giants, dragons, and unicorns

Chester Green Festival: 7th June is the Outdoor Festival in Chester Town Hall and Exchange Square, followed on **14th June** by an Ideas and Action Day at Picturehouse and Town Hall. Check their website for further details

A Member Remembers: Fran Reading in conversation with Claire Chatterton

You may not recognise the name, but you might have heard Claire speak when she came to talk to us about 'Tales from Chester Asylum'. Her passion for both health services and history came across, and our chat showed me her interest in these topics and life in general. Three things struck me as important in our conversation – firstly how vital it is to challenge yourself both in and out of work; secondly, how we need great mentors; and thirdly, how we should all make more effort to keep in touch with friends and family.

Claire was born in Lincolnshire and spent her early years enjoying the freedom of farm life. At 18 she went to Goldsmiths College in London to take a degree in Social Sciences, combined with training as a nurse at the London Hospital. Life in the East End included encounters with dockers, nuns and friends of the Kray Twins – sounds a bit like Call the Midwife! She enjoyed the multi-cultural location followed by three years as a practice nurse in Tower Hamlets. She trained and worked as a mental health nurse in Oxford, alongside teaching at Oxford Brookes. This was a challenging role, as asylums were closing and Project 2000 was being implemented. This was a major UK nursing education reform shifting training from hospital-based apprenticeships to higher education. Unusual in being dual-qualified in adult and mental health nursing, Claire then worked in HMP Bullingdon as a nursing sister.

Throughout her career, her ability to seek out new opportunities and take on new jobs was supported by some key and influential people. Looking back, you are grateful to these mentors - it makes you see your role differently and encourages you to give others the same support you had. Having worked part-time in teaching, Claire moved to Brighton to take on a full-time role as a nurse lecturer. She then decided to take a risk, give up her job, and complete a PhD in the History of Nursing, which was combined with teaching at the University of Salford. In 2007 she moved to Chester, where she worked at the cathedral as Education Officer as well as working part time (later full time) for the Open University, in their School of Health, Wellbeing and Social Care. She is now visiting Professor at the University of Chester and the University of Chichester.

Volunteering is important to Claire – giving back, educating others and enjoying interactions with all sorts of people. She was a Guide Leader for over ten years and while in Manchester volunteered at Dunham Massey, Royal Exchange



Theatre, Elizabeth Gaskell's House and the Victoria Baths. She has been a Sunday School leader at Chester Cathedral and an education volunteer at Erddig. She said that working with young people was such a joy, and as in many other areas of her life, meeting and supporting others has given her a different outlook on life. She is a founder member of the Association for the History of Nursing (UKAHN) and in 2020 was made a Fellow of the Royal College of Nursing which celebrated her hard work, dedication and contribution to the nursing profession. She also served for eight years as chair of the RCN's history of nursing forum.

She has been an invaluable help at the **Riverside Museum in Chester**. If you haven't already been, make sure you take advantage of its opening hours on the 1st Wednesday of the month, 1–4pm, followed by a talk. Looked after by retired health professionals, the museum gives a fascinating insight into nursing, social work and healthcare. The displays include some of the instruments used in the past – be glad for today's medical practices!

Claire has only recently joined Chester u3a, but has taken an active part in ambling, walking and attending talks. Keeping in touch with friends is important and this certainly seems to lead to a lot of fun activities all across the country, including the Charleston Festival. She is busy outside u3a with keep-fit activities at the newly refurbished Northgate Arena, as well as meeting friends and doing cross-stitch. Claire believes that whilst you can, make the most of what is on offer, enjoying friends, fun and learning – sounds like a u3a motto!

Wednesday Walking Group, by Ian Cross

Not finding the Toolerstone

The second Wednesday in April – the regular day for the Wednesday Walking Group’s monthly walk – turned out to be the finest day of Spring so far and rather better than what we have experienced in May. So what better place to find yourself than on the Hartford bypass, cars whizzing past at 70 mph, for a one-mile trapeise between the two sections of our walk?

Admittedly we were forewarned, it only lasted 20 minutes, and there was a surprising array of wildflowers on the grass verge, including early bluebells. And it did enable us to visit two beautiful areas which were unfamiliar to many of us.

We started at the village car park in Sandiway, walking along a lovely undulating country path to reach the Hartford bypass, for our brief ordeal. Crossing the bypass we entered Vale Royal Woods for a recuperative coffee break, before reaching Vale Royal Locks on the river Weaver. En route our group paparazzi decided to stage a photoshoot.



We then continued towards woods surrounding Vale Royal golf course along a long, but not very winding path.



Skirting Vale Royal golf course we reached Whitegate, for lunch in the churchyard, with the cherries in bloom.



The final leg took us back past Petty Pool and through woodland to Sandiway.

As to the Toolerstone, we only found out about this from a walking app, which claimed we had passed near to it. Apparently it is a medieval boundary stone defining the lands of Vale Royal Abbey. Perhaps next time?

Start point: Sandiway Village Carpark

Duration: about 4 hours

Distance: 8.6 miles

Total ascent: about 300 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, e.g. with a map, keep to footpaths, and go in single file along busy roads.

Potential New Group: Social Get Together Group

Easy meeting... come along for a natter, a cup of tea, good company and maybe new friendship .

Meetings can be on different days and maybe different venues, depending on what group members want Nothing is yet set in stone, and we welcome your suggestions, including ideas for the group's title.



If you are interested please contact Dianna at Groups@chesteru3a.org.uk.

Social Golf, by Paul Edgell

The Social Golf group plays nine holes every Thursday at Sandfield, weather permitting. There are currently sixteen active members.

In 2025 we decided to play nine holes once a month at an alternative local course whilst maintaining the Sandfield schedule.

In April this year we revisited the Flint Course, which is a little more demanding than Sandfield. The weather was very kind and we all completed the course. On 27th May we played at Plassey, Wrexham.





Answers to the Quiz on p4

- | | | | |
|-----------|-----------------------------|---------|---------------------------------|
| 1) 13 | a baker's dozen | 6) 6 | wives of Henry the Eighth |
| 2) 7 | Pillars of Wisdom | 7) 1688 | date of the Glorious Revolution |
| 3) 147 | maximum break in snooker | 8) 52 | playing cards in a pack |
| 4) 20,000 | leagues under the sea | 9) 2001 | A Space Odyssey |
| 5) 50 | states in the United States | 10) 366 | days in a leap year |

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.

	Picturehouse	St Columba's
June	Tuesday 2nd Thursday Strollers	Thursday 18th Tues/Weds Walking
July	Tuesday 7th Ukelele 1 and 2	Thursday 16th Walking



The cut-off date for the next Chester Times is Saturday 20th June 2026.

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

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