



# Chester Times

July 2026

**u3a** learn,  
laugh,  
live  
Chester

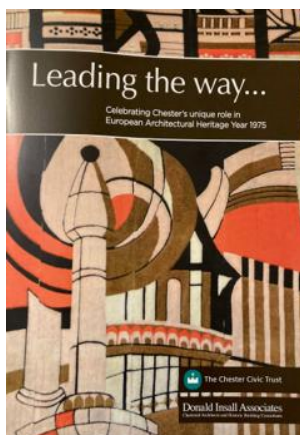
## Message from Fran Reading, Chair

I have recently led two walks for the Heritage Festival. As a small part of those I researched and spoke about the **1975 European Architectural Heritage Year (EAHY)**. EAHY was a joint campaign by twenty-four nations to halt the steady loss of irreplaceable buildings and the erosion of character in historic towns throughout Europe. Chester was a pilot project for Heritage Year – one of fifty towns or areas in Europe – and was chosen to illustrate aspects of practical conservation.

There was a lot of focus across the city, but particularly in Lower Bridge Street, which at the time was very neglected. There was an exhibition in the newly opened Chester Heritage Centre (now Sick to Death within St Michael's), and guided tours that included Gamul House and Dutch Houses. The brochure (see below) shows the amazing **Chester Tapestry**, now on display in the Town Hall. It also mentions the commemorative stamps and first day cover.

I have also become obsessed with a website called *Britain from Above*, after I saw some views of Eastgate Street in the 1920s. I am going to continue my local history research, moving on to Frodsham Street and Foregate Street, so watch out for further updates.

Chester Green Festival took place in June and is a great lead-in to our Showcase Talks in September where our theme is **Chester u3a Goes Green**. We hope that you will come along and listen to some slightly different green-focussed talks including Chester Zoo, Organic Farming and Recycling your Books. There are also some 'green' events as part of the Festival of Ideas happening 2-5<sup>th</sup> July. Come along and see what our members put forward as their *advice to their younger selves* and see what the university psychologists thought of our ramblings!



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**Tuesday, 7<sup>th</sup> July**

**Picturehouse, 2pm for 2.30pm**

**Chris Fozzard: Old News - Tragedy and Comedy in the Early Chester Press**

Chris is a local historian and writer with two published works, *A Short History of Newton Hall, Chester* and *The Chester Book Club, 1824*. His talk will be based on a review of Chester newspapers published in the mid - to late 18th century, when newspapers were in their infancy. He will look at human interest stories which relate serious occurrences, illustrate how people lived at that time or are simply amusing to the modern ear.



**Thursday, 16<sup>th</sup> July**

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

**David Hearn: The First Mersey Road Tunnel**

When it was built in the 1930s, the Queensway Tunnel from Liverpool to Birkenhead was a masterpiece of engineering hailed as the 8th Wonder of the World. In this talk, you hear all about this great venture from inception through to its opening by King George V in 1934.



**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 for future talks, please email [speakersec@chesteru3a.org.uk](mailto:speakersec@chesteru3a.org.uk).



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

When Tina Saunders chose the title of her talk, *Needles and Sparkles*, with the latter word she was probably referring to the embellishments on the clothes she makes, but it was certainly also an apt description of the talk itself, which sparkled from start to finish.

Born and brought up in Essex, after leaving school she went to train at the Royal School of Needlework in Hampton Court Palace. There, she undertook a three-year apprenticeship in embroidery. In the third year, students were expected to do three weeks' work experience, and Tina was taken on at Jim Henson's studio in Camden, which she found inspirational.

At the end of her course, Tina wrote to dozens of potential employers and received plenty of rejection letters, but the shoemaker Jimmy Choo invited her to his workshop for a trial day. This led to a trial month, during which her pay was a travel card and a hot meal each day, and then to ten years of part-time employment. She found it a lovely place to work, with a very kind employer.

After some time, Tina wanted to improve her knowledge of dressmaking, so she took a part-time degree at the London College of Fashion. Towards the end of her course, she saw a job advertised that sounded ideal. The address to which she had to send her application was a PO Box address, so she had no idea who it was. She then received an envelope bearing the Royal Crest. In it, she found an invitation to go to Buckingham Palace for an interview for a job as Dressmaker to the Queen. After a few hiccups, she secured the position and absolutely loved it, making numerous state gowns. Probably the busiest year was the Diamond Jubilee year, for which Tina made so many outfits that she suspected redundancy was on the cards, and her instinct was correct.

Since then, Tina and her husband have moved to Wirral, where she runs her own business, aptly named *Needles and Sparkles*, running classes, making special-occasion outfits, and giving sparkling talks.

For our second talk David Mottram gave us an insight into Eastham Pleasure Gardens, providing

brilliant photos to bring it back to life from its peak, 1890-1910. The original focus at Eastham was the ferry to and from Liverpool, for commercial and later tourism use. In 1357 the Saint Werburgh's monks had a licence to operate the ferry, called Job's Ferry. In 1509 it was renamed Eastham Ferry. Eastham Ferry House was built for the ferryman in 1754 while the Stanley Arms (now Eastham Ferry Hotel) was not completed until 1843. In the intervening years Eastham became a tourist destination, focussing on day trippers, arriving in steam-powered paddle boats.

In 1847 the term *Pleasure Garden* appeared, with the North side reserved for hotel guests, and the South side for people of limited means! The Stanley family's demise led to Richard Naylor taking over - an ambitious man who created a new zig-zag pier, ticket office and floating landing stage.

From 1871 the gardens developed further, and included summer houses, dancing greens, floral gardens, a clock tower and presumably *places for private canoodling and troth-plighting!* In 1874 Thompson and Gough were employed to make Eastham Pleasure Gardens the most popular day trip resort in the North of England. This included installing the Eastham Zoological Gardens with lions, apes and a 15ft deep Bear Pit. The animals were sold in 1890, but attractions to replace them included the tight-rope walker Blondin and a performing elephant who refused to complete a six-mile swim!

In 1887 the Jubilee Arch was installed, and between 1887 and 1894 many people came just to watch the building of the Manchester Ship Canal. Later a boating lake, ballroom, entertainment area, shooting range, loop-the-loop, water shoot and Vienna Café were built. However, in 1929 the ferry services stopped, in 1958 the ballroom burnt down and in 1970 the area was designated as a Woodland and Country Park. If you want to explore yourself, David has provided a self-guided tour which is available on our website.

## A Member Remembers

### Fran Reading in conversation with May Farrington

In May's words, "I feel so privileged to have lived in Chester for so long." We spent a fascinating hour talking about Chester of old, May's jobs and her family life in this great city. If I had realised how much she knew about local history, having been a local guide, I would have brought along more local history research questions!

May was born in Birkenhead in 1935, but when the war started and spitfires were fighting overhead, her bricklayer father decided to protect his family by moving to Sealand Road in Chester. She talked about her *siren suit* which she wore in her bunk in the Anderson shelter when they were woken in the night, about the nearby Italian prisoners of war and about people watching Pathe News in cinemas to find out what was happening.

She described her happy childhood as better than Swallows and Amazons – fields, woods, country roads, swimming in the Dee, cycling and picnics with sugar butties. There were farms on Bumpers and Ferry Lane where she helped with haymaking and she sledged down Gorst's Lane – great pace and only a dug-in heel to stop at the bottom! The air was filled with the competing smells of the scent factory and sewage works. She chased after the GIs at the Sealand Road airbase asking for gum and, in the street, touched the collar of British sailors for luck. At school May was taught copperplate handwriting, using dip pens and inkwells. They were so short of paper that children had to write in the margins. She remembers occasionally taking in 'a penny for the Spitfires'.

She said that Chester in the Forties and Fifties was like a village. Ladies, often carrying a basket, always 'dressed up' to go to town, with hats or headscarves, matching gloves and a brooch. Chester was full of individual shops like Teresa Ryan for gowns and cafes, including Woolworths, Kardomah and The Plane Tree, with waitresses in

black and white. People shopped in the old market with Kirks for flowers and Bewleys for fruit and veg.

The Gaumont Cinema had uniformed staff. There was ballroom dancing at Clemences, Quaintways and the town hall, jiving at the Riverpark Ballroom and visits to the Royalty Theatre with their resident repertory group. Performances ended with the singing of 'God Save the King'. Near the market was a large water-tank with EWS on it – Emergency Water Supply in case of bombs! Telegraph boys cycled round Chester in pillbox hats, whistling as they went. There were few cars, telephones or bank accounts. Women were homemakers. Clothes were 'make do and mend' and often two sizes too big! It was a happy, uncomplicated life with a great support system around you.

The left photo on the next page, now displayed in the Storyhouse lift, shows May, aged 15, cycling to her first job at Chester Archives. Her granddaughter, Julia, while working on the Storyhouse project, solved the mystery of the cycling lady. May is now known as 'The Lady in the Lift.'

Women had been discouraged from furthering their education but, in her thirties, May decided she wanted more from her life. She took a BA in Education and taught art for several years. Art remains a passion and she has been part of a WEA Abstract Art Club for 22 years.

I asked her what led to her long and happy life. She said it was being interested in life, not giving up, having a go at things, meeting people, enjoying time with family and friends, laughing at yourself, not over-exercising (!!), and knowing your limits. Enjoy what you do but don't overdo it. Chester u3a is part of that, with our twice-monthly talks, which May attends. Long may it continue.



[May cycling to her first job](#)



*A more recent picture of May with her bike*

### Chester u3a Monthly Quiz

Can you identify these Cheshire landmarks?

There are some anagrams and some missing letter clues.

Answers on Page 8. Capital letters are there to help you.



1	_ o d r _ _ _ / _ _ _ k	6	w h e d a R a (1 word)
2	_ n d _ _ t _ _ / B _ _ _ / _ i f _	7	_ h _ / _ c _ / c r _ _ _ / _ a _ _
3	T k a o n P r t a t (2 words)	8	e F t m r l o s D e e r e a (2 words)
4	e e e s a t B n o C s t l (2 words)	9	_ _ e _ t e _ / _ a t _ _ _ r a _
5	S t _ _ _ _ w / _ e f _ _ e _ y	10	P n N y o i r r t o o r (2 words)



["THE SILVER JUBILEE BRIDGE CHESHIRE"](#) by Terry Kearney  
[-Public Domain](#)

## Walking Report Summer 2026, by Janet Money

Over the past 6 months our walks have ranged geographically as far as West Kirby, Delamere and Hawarden, in character between countryside and the Chester canal network, and from old favourites to new routes.

One of those favourites is the heathland at Heswall Dales. For our walk in March, we started from the Jug and Bottle in Heswall, made our way through various green spaces to the Dee estuary and followed the shoreline for about a mile before turning up through Heswall Dales back to the pub.



*Heswall Dales – taking a break on a handy bench*

Our early June walk was new to the group. From the Bluebell Café at Great Barrow, we headed east then north, along paths, through several hayfields full of buttercups, and past a number of farms, with a few diversions to avoid cattle. We stopped for a break at the pretty village green at Dunham on the Hill; the gents chose the wall while the ladies chose the comfort of a bench; there is a second bench with a charming dedication to the man who used to mow the green. We then returned south on lanes and more fields back to the Bluebell Café for an excellent lunch. This was a lovely quiet traffic-free walk with “wildlife” which included llamas, a donkey, chicken, horses and cattle.



*A well-earned break at Dunham on the Hill*



Our walk on May Day was again one we had done before. From the Grosvenor Arms at Aldford we walked along the river to Eccleston Ferry and back for lunch at the Grosvenor. May is normally a lovely month for walking; the weather was warm and sunny, and the path was at its prettiest, as you can see from the photos.



*On the path to Eccleston Ferry*

The Walking Group goes out on the first Friday and third Monday of the month, for between four and six miles, followed by an optional lunch in a café or pub.



## Opera, by Steve Moore

The Opera Appreciation Group continues to thrive. We comprise upwards of 28 members after the arrival of new members keen to further an interest in the medium. It's been a challenging year with some deviation from the mainstream works of the opera house. A case in point was the viewing of a ragtime opera (Treemonisha) by Scott Joplin – yes! Who'd have thought it? An eye opener for all of us. Similarly, a recent showing of Lessons in Love and Violence by George Benjamin elicited a “marmite” response from the audience. More traditional fayre comes later in the year with a baroque spectacular (Hercules in Love) from the court of Louis X1V and, more recently, the court of Turandot and her cronies, where none shall sleep. We aim to cater for all tastes.

The increased interest shown in the group during the year has led to the temporary use of a waiting list as the room we meet in does have limits on capacity, but this list is reviewed on a regular basis.

Meetings usually take the form of a projected complete opera, often abridged by a sponsor, so that time limitations can be managed. The sponsor is responsible for preparing an easily digested synopsis of the plot which can be distributed by the Group Leader seven to ten days before the meeting. They may also wish to say a few words on the day. Some meetings feature musical compilations and spoken material to support learning.

For more information, drop a note to [Opera Appreciation](#) on the Chester u3a website.





## Bus Buddies, by Margaret Whaley

In April Bus Buddies celebrated being two years old by going to Gladstone’s Library for lunch. It is a convenient location for us as Hawarden is on more than one bus route.

Some of us can remember our first outing in April 2024, when eight determined people met at the Bus Interchange, well wrapped up in waterproof clothes. Cheshire was just at the tail end of a bad storm and it was very wet. Our optimism was rewarded, as by the time we got to our destination of Nantwich the rain was only a slight drizzle. In fact, the rain enhanced our day out as the road was closed because of flooding when it was time to go home, so we went on an alternative scenic route! That day was fairly typical of our future outings. We went off in two groups - one group went shopping and the others went round Nantwich’s magnificent church and the excellent small museum.

We have been to so many places since that first outing. Going round roughly clockwise we have been to Warrington, Nantwich, Northwich, Frodsham, Whitchurch, Wrexham, Mold, Ruthin, Corwen, Holywell, Neston, Parkgate, Ness Gardens and West Kirby. One of our trips involved a train journey as well as the bus. We travelled by train from Neston to Wrexham, across the marshes and through the old John Summers/British Steel works. Those u3a

members who have worked there in the past might enjoy seeing the magnificent, restored Grade 2 listed clock tower on the old offices.

Last summer we did one extra trip and became “Boat Buddies”, going up the River Dee from the Groves.

Of course, all our trips involve lunch and possibly a coffee break as well, and we are beginning to have our favourite places! An average of twelve people goes on every trip. We don’t always go around as one large group, and sometimes one or two people want to explore more thoroughly, but nobody is left on their own - unless they want to be! We just go to new places and have FUN.

A second group (Bus Buddies 2) has been running for a year. Their trips are on Thursdays while ours are on Tuesdays. Who knows there might even be a Bus Buddies 3 in the future if there is sufficient demand!



*Double Decker Bus (Public Domain)*

## Answers to Quiz on Page

- |   |                    |    |                    |
|---|--------------------|----|--------------------|
| 1 | Jodrell Bank       | 6  | Rawhead            |
| 2 | Anderton Boat Lift | 7  | The Ice Cream Farm |
| 3 | Tatton Park        | 8  | Delamere Forest    |
| 4 | Beeston Castle     | 9  | Chester Cathedral  |
| 5 | Stanlow Refinery   | 10 | Norton Priory      |



## Events during July 2026 (mainly free or for a donation)

**Festival of Ideas 2<sup>nd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> July** - See their website for details of events. All events FREE including the joint Chester u3a/University of Chester event on Saturday.

**Sandy Lane Ferry** - Take a trip across to The Meadows from Sandy Lane Car Park. Open weekends until the last Sunday in September, 10.30-4.30pm. £1 adults, children and dogs. 50p bikes each way.

**Heritage Chester** – Various towers are open this month – further details [@heritagechester](https://www.heritagechester.org)

- Lead Works Shot Tower – 18<sup>th</sup> July
- King Charles Tower – 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> July
- Bonewaldesthorpe’s Tower and Camera Obscura – 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> July

**Chester Castle** – Open 11-3pm weekends throughout the summer

**Chester u3a Treasure Hunts** – Discover more about your city with the [treasure hunts](#) on our website.

## 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](mailto: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
<b>July</b>	<b>Tuesday 7th</b> Ukelele 1 & 2	<b>Thursday 16th</b> Walking
<b>August</b>	<b>Tuesday 4th</b> Wine Appreciation 1 & 2	<b>Thursday 20<sup>th</sup></b> Craft

**The cut-off date for the next Chester Times is Monday 20<sup>th</sup> July 2026.**

Please send contributions to: [chestertimes@chesteru3a.org.uk](mailto:chestertimes@chesteru3a.org.uk) or: PO Box 167 Chester CH1 9FB.

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