



Chester Times

August 2026

u3a learn,
laugh,
live
Chester

Message from Fran Reading, Chair

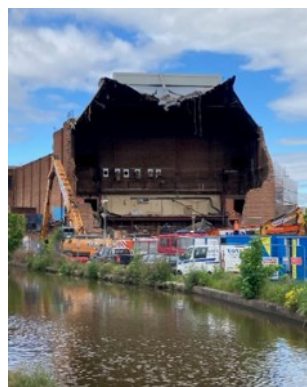
I know that a number of you joined me at the recent *Festival of Ideas*, organised by the University of Chester. What a fantastic opportunity it was to listen to lots of ideas and understand others' points of view. My attendance list was varied and included a discussion on homelessness in Chester, understanding about Roman history with Greg Jenner (historic advisor on *Horrible Histories*), a very thought-provoking interview with Dame Jenny Harries (previous Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England), a talk by our own Peter Carrington on the Rows of Chester, a very interesting review of research topics for the Professional Doctorate in Social Care, a discussion about the life of Randolph Caldecott (Chester illustrator), presentations on munition workers turning yellow and on smallpox in Chester, and finally our fabulous u3a event – *Through the Looking Glass*. I'm exhausted, exhilarated and full of ideas!

As I always say, it is vital to keep your mind active, and I will continue this with u3a activities for History (I presented Joan of Arc to the group last week), and

Local History. I also enjoy Object of the Month at the Grosvenor Museum – 30 minutes about one of their objects, and then off for coffee with friends. At Storyhouse Elders I met a lady from Cheshire West and we chatted about the needs of older people and how important it is that her team get out and about and find out what we really want! I have invited her to one of our pre-meeting tea/coffee times, so if you see her, pass on your thoughts!

I am glad to say that barring the occasional bit of time off for illness, the majority of our members are very active, and squeeze a lot into their weeks – active in mind and body. However, if you do have some room in your schedule, why not consider being part of the Chester u3a committee, and giving something back? **Remember, we are run by the members, for the members** – without roles being filled there will be no u3a.

Finally, I have been watching the Gaumont Cinema/ Bingo Hall being taken down – nearly there – see the photos below.



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Tuesday 4th August. Picturehouse, 2pm for 2.30pm

Simon Seligman: 'DEBO' – Mitford, Duchess of Devonshire and Housewife 1920–2014

Simon Seligman worked at Chatsworth for 20 years, starting with a summer job car parking and ending up as their first Head of Communications. His bosses were the 11th Duke of Devonshire and his wife Deborah (famous in her own right as 'Debo', the youngest of the six Mitford sisters). In partnership with her husband, Debo transformed Chatsworth from being the worn-out survivor of decades of taxation, war and social change into one of the best-loved and heavily-visited historic houses in the country. Along the way, she became a best-selling author and sell-out speaker, champion of the countryside, founder of one of the first – and finest – farm shops, trustee and patron of numerous charities and good causes, devotee of Elvis Presley and the most famous poultry keeper in the country. She met Hitler and Churchill, knew Macmillan and Kennedy, was a trusted confidante of the King when Prince of Wales, played her part as the steady heart of the Mitford sisters' melodramas and was friends with a dazzling array of artistic contemporaries. In this talk, Simon pays tribute to her astonishing life.



*The Duchess of Devonshire (Pietro Annigoni)
Devonshire Collections Chatsworth*

Thursday 20th August. St Columba's Church Hall, 10am for 10.30am

Christine Holt: The Partition of India – A Family Experience

Chester u3a member Christine Holt will give us a personal perspective on the Partition of India and Pakistan. Christine's grandfather was a British soldier in India who met and married her grandmother, an Anglo-Indian, in 1932. She grew up listening to their stories of life in India and Afghanistan, but nothing was more dramatic than their flight from Kabul to Bombay in 1947, at the time of the Partition. In recent years, as her Dad's memory started to fade, Christine started writing down the stories and researched the political backdrop for this time of great turmoil and tragedy.



Dates for your diaries

On **Tuesday 1st September**, we shall be welcoming back actor and playwright Shaun Higgins to Picturehouse to deliver his new one-man show on the life of Charles Darwin. Booking will be required for this meeting and members will be emailed on 17th August with a link to reserve their place. Please note that 1st September marks the start of the 2026/7 Chester u3a membership year, so make sure that you renew your membership if you want to attend.

You can view future talks on our [website](https://www.chesteru3a.org.uk). If you have any suggestions for 2027, please email speakersec@chesteru3a.org.uk.



Report on the July Monthly Meetings, by Fran Reading

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

You forget that until the 19th century, local papers, including the *Chester Courant* and *Chester Chronicle*, delivered national news as well as local. Newspapers were often read in subscription libraries and coffee houses or hollered by the town crier. We heard tales of lost millions through shipwrecks, freezing temperatures in Chester (minus 26°C), Mr Chippendale and his wooden leg (!) and Benjamin Fox who was hung but scared everyone in the dissection room when he breathed again. Chris also presented us with dilemmas where we had to decide what we would do in given circumstances – ‘would you marry a strange man, claiming your husband was dead or wait for your husband’s return (very few takers for marriage!)’

Highwaymen were often reported and there were many sad stories of women’s hard times, including having to pawn their children or be sold in public by their husbands. Cross-dressing stories were also rife, with one ‘gentleman’ being reported for absconding to give birth! In one case a bride was jilted at the altar by several suitors, and eventually married the vicar. Who knew that the state lottery gave out such enormous prizes that there were ‘extreme consumption contests’ including eating 102 eggs in 45 minutes or that ‘pedestrianism’ was a thing, including walking backwards over large distances.

There were also very sad stories including the Watergate Street Puppet Show explosion on 5th November 1772. Bizarre things happened – kangaroos shown in a pub in Northgate Street, hair powder exploding after using the wrong formula, and cock-fighting birds with wooden legs. They say ‘Tragedy + Time = Comedy’ and that was certainly proved true in our early news!

David Hearn: The First Mersey Road Tunnel – ‘The 8th Wonder of the World’

I am sure that we have all driven through this tunnel at some time but not realised how, or why, it came about. We will also have seen large towers mysteriously arising throughout the centre of Liverpool and not known they are ventilation shafts. This, and more, was explained in David’s fascinating talk which generated many audience questions and also identified people whose relatives were involved in building the tunnel. Sir Archibald Salvidge, ‘The King of Liverpool’, who was the man behind its creation, seemed to feature prominently in a movie showing lots of pickaxe action but very little graft! At the time it was the largest underwater road tunnel in the world and a great feat of engineering. John Brodie was a lead engineer on the project and he also invented the goal net!

There was no obvious health and safety at the time, with workers endangering their lives every day as they built the two-mile-long tunnel using gelignite and pneumatic tools, added ventilation shafts (the fans moved 16 million cubic feet of air per minute), plastered and painted the tunnel walls, installed pumps to get rid of a million gallons of water per year and installed the ‘curtains’ used to disguise the tunnel entrance on opening day! The celebrations in 1934 included a pageant with 200,000 spectators, and a free drive through. There is an Egyptian theme to the 1930s décor at the tunnel entrances and on the towers. In the 1980s the tunnels were cleaned by hand – they now have special cleaning machines, along with auto tolls, enormous recovery vehicles and a Mersey Tunnel Police Force. Three movies have been filmed there – Fast and Furious 6, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, and Yesterday – next time you watch them, look out for the tunnel clips.

12.8 million vehicles use the tunnel annually, and as it celebrated its 92nd birthday in July, long may it continue.

Report on Through the Looking Glass – Postcards to My Younger and Older Self

Chester u3a organised this event at Chester Town Hall on Saturday 4th July as part of the Chester *Festival of Ideas*, in collaboration with Professors Moira Lafferty and Lisa Oakley from the University of Chester's Division of Psychology.

We began with a chance to look at an exhibition of postcards written by Chester u3a members to their younger selves and by psychology students to their older selves. Letter-writing exercises are widely used in psychology because they provide a window into how people construct their identity, make sense of the past, imagine the future and develop self-understanding. Although every postcard was unique, several common themes emerged regardless of age, and Moira and Lisa explored the research that helps explain these shared experiences.

One of the strongest themes was **Gratitude and Joy**. Many participants hoped that life would be filled with happiness, kindness and meaningful relationships. Research shows that practising gratitude improves wellbeing and resilience, and Self-Determination Theory suggests that people flourish when they experience competence and a sense of belonging.

Another common message was to **Take Opportunities**, particularly around travel and exploring the world, and not to be afraid of failure. Developmental psychology shows that learning from setbacks is an important part of growth, helping people become more adaptable and better able to face future challenges.

Many postcards encouraged people to **Follow Their Dreams**. Moira linked this to the Theory of Self-Actualisation, which proposes that people are motivated to realise their potential and become the fullest version of themselves. Pursuing meaningful goals provides purpose, direction and authenticity, while Goal Setting Theory suggests that clear personal goals increase motivation and persistence.

Messages of **Self-acceptance and Self-belief** also appeared frequently. Lisa explained how Self-Compassion Theory draws on humanistic psychology, social psychology, and Buddhist philosophy to explain how treating oneself with

kindness promotes psychological well-being. Linked to this, the Self-Efficacy Theory proposes

that belief in one's capability to succeed dictates motivation, resilience, and performance. People with high self-efficacy view challenges as tasks to be mastered rather than threats to be avoided. Self-efficacy has become one of the most influential concepts in psychology because it helps explain why two people with similar abilities may perform differently, depending on what they believe they can achieve, and it has been widely applied in areas such as sports coaching.

Relationships emerged as another central theme. Many postcards reminded readers to value time with family and friends because they will not always be there. Psychology shows that humans have a fundamental need to belong, and Social Identity Theory highlights the importance of relationships and group membership for wellbeing.

The postcards from Chester u3a members also contained practical life lessons: be open to new ideas while remaining true to yourself, worry less because many feared events never happen, avoid unhelpful comparisons with others – particularly on social media – and plan for the future (think early about your pension!).

In conclusion, despite being written by people at very different stages of life, the underlying messages were remarkably similar. Psychology helps to explain why these themes appear so consistently and tells us that, while our circumstances change, the foundations of a meaningful and fulfilling life remain constant.

You can view the exhibition of postcards online at this [link](#).



A Member Remembers: Fran Reading in Conversation with Ken Golby

What an interesting hour we spent chatting in the very busy Chester Bus Station café! Highlights to come – Freeman of Coventry, postcard collecting, health and safety in the building trade, being a roadie for the Bee Gees for one night, sailing on HMS Coventry, Gang Shows and mixing with people who don't think they're old.

Ken was born in Royal Leamington Spa but spent most of his life in Coventry before moving to Cheshire 17 years ago with Madeline, his partner of 40 years. They have been active members of Chester u3a (hence the cap in the photo!), and activities have included holidays, antiques, family history and the science group, of which Ken is still a member. He also attends most of our talks, enjoying a chat with other attendees.

Most of his life he has been in the building trade, having been a bricklayer apprentice after leaving his comprehensive school – one of the first in the country, with 1500 boys. Bricklaying was an option he considered, as the alternative was indoor factory work or mining. We talked about how physically hard his job was, how you 'put up with the weather' and also how free of risk assessments building was. You built your own scaffolding in those days, as well as carrying large blocks and toolboxes up ladders (not sending them up by forklift). Ken finished his career as a craftsman, turning his skills to many types of work on a site. After 25 years he became a Freeman of Coventry for his servitude (unique to Coventry - no patrimony here!) and was made Master of the Guild in 1999. Chatting to dignitaries in this role led to five days on HMS Coventry, travelling from Portland Bill to Hull and observing naval exercises along the way, as well as dining with the captain.

Postcard collecting seems like an interesting, varied and sociable hobby and Ken has a large collection of postcards – mainly of Bournemouth - having had family holidays there, as well as some other unusual ones including from Basra/Suez Canal from the 1920s, written by his grandad. Madeline collects postcard silks. They both enjoy going to local post-

card fairs and are active members of two local postcard clubs. Ken also collects holiday camp badges, and told me about the first camp, Cunninghams, which opened on the Isle of Man in 1894. Originally an all-male camp, it provided working-class men with an active, outdoor holiday under canvas.



Ken is also interested in family history and has traced his back a few generations, writing articles for the family history magazine in Coventry.

Ken loved being on the stage and had a vast repertoire of past performances including Gang Shows – really revues before they changed to the 'Ralph Reader' format. He was also in amateur performances in local theatres. He has photos of the old productions he was in, including a ballet troupe made up of men (before Matthew Bourne came along!). He was also offered the opportunity to be a roadie for the Bee Gees after helping for one performance - very tempted, but it was too risky: he was concerned about the popstar lifestyle and didn't want to live that sort of life. He was much happier enjoying his job, gardening, skiing in Austria and Italy, being chair of a local Probus group and meeting people. U3a provided the chance to meet new people when they moved up to Chester, and he has been with us ever since.

We both agreed that it doesn't matter what your actual age is – it's all about mental attitude, mixing with others who don't think they're old, keeping up with interesting hobbies, joining groups where there are people you like, chatting to people in your neighbourhood, being friendly and having a positive attitude every day. Ken is a brilliant member of Chester u3a and certainly brightens my day, and others', when we meet.



Cryptic Crosswords, by Vivian Downing

Our Chester U3A Cryptic Crossword Group continues to meet on Friday afternoons and to pit our collective wits against the compilers of the *Daily Telegraph*, *Times*, *Guardian* and *Independent* crossword puzzles. The sessions certainly give us a good mental workout!

We are currently full, as we meet in a house, so space is limited, but can take names for a waiting list. We are also part of an Inter-Group set of u3a groups, mostly based in the North-West of England, organised by Brian Wreford of the Knutsford group. Within this Inter-Group we take it in turns to set clues for the other groups, usually on a specific theme.

Here are some examples of the clues our group set, on the theme of Cosmetics and Toiletries.

(Answers on p 11 below).

1. Female in band adds colour (7)
2. Ian Hislop left out digital application (4,6)
3. Strangely odd and ornate means of making oneself more approachable (9)
4. Intellectual Eastenders writer on the radio, highlights a feature (7,6)
5. Winning blow with back of left hand leading to black eye (4)
6. Confusing direction on the bottle in the bathroom (11)

Amblers, by Sandy Boyne

We have enjoyed our walks for the first six months of the year, visiting Parkgate (an old favourite), the Countess Country Park, Whitegate Way, a walk around Chester's walls and our lovely Grosvenor Park, and a leisurely stroll along the canal from The Cheshire Cat.

Unfortunately our June walk at Raby was cancelled

because of extremely hot weather so we shall do that at a later date.

We are a sociable group, averaging 11-15 amblers for each walk, and we enjoy both tranquil countryside and interesting city venues. There are plenty of opportunities for social chat and refreshments.





Friday Writers, by John Townsend

The Friday Writers Group does just what it says on the tin - it meets on a Friday every month and writes. Each member takes a turn on a rota to decide a 'trigger' for the next month and then to host that meeting. Everyone has that month to write whatever that trigger suggests to them and to circulate it in advance so that everyone has a chance to read it. We then meet and comment on each piece, to explore motivation, any stories behind the stories, and how easy or difficult each writer found that subject. The meetings are amusing rather than academic, therapeutic rather than theoretical. The host records the discussion and we repeat the process. The simplest way to illustrate the process is by attaching the notes of our last meeting.

Notes of meeting on 12th June 2026

Su, Chris, Annie, Trish, Rosie and John met at his gaff and reviewed 'I'll never forget'. As always we all treated the subject in different ways.

Su remembered to bring June and Tuesday back into focus. June thought she had forgotten her shopping list and tried to remember what was on it. When she checked, the list was in her bag all along. Tuesday reassured her she wasn't losing it, and they ended up enjoying marmalade and haddock carpaccio at the Dog and Boxers. We all loved the story, if not the dining options.

Chris, or was it Alice, recalled the adventures of Cecil the cat, named after Cecil Road where he was found and adopted by Alice. Flat-living in a 'no pets' world meant Alice's much loved Gran had to take over caring for Cecil but he was killed by a train. But he wasn't! Gran could not care for him when her husband had a stroke but the family felt it was kinder to tell Alice he had been fatally injured rather than adopted. A beautiful story full of love for cats, Gran and Alice and we all loved it.

Annie described a series of troubling world events which she recalled for some one who had 'opted out' and also recalled how this person would have reacted to these events – usually with horror, disgust or dismay. In the final paragraph Annie revealed that the person she was thinking about, Dave, had killed himself, troubled by whatever demons had haunted

him, but not these events as he had left before they happened. A really strong piece with a finale that shocked us all and which had us feeling the weight of current troublesome times.

Trish told us about the birth of a litter of nine puppies which coincided with a lunar eclipse witnessed with the family. We learned about showing dogs and the special qualities of Heelers – nippy cattle drovers – and the difficulty of giving up pups for adoption. As always Trish's knowledge of and love for animals shone through. We all agreed that Trish's writing has developed over time.

Rosie demonstrated what 'I'll never forget' really means with a detailed description of her family's house move when she was five. Not only did this mean a new house with a telephone (and soon-changed brown and grey decor and overbearing trees) but also a new school to replace the one Rosie hated because big sister did. Rosie's total recall helped us all remember that old decoration and the days of Bakelite phones and party lines.

John described the many small ways that memories fade, and the fear that these may be precursors of more substantial and emotional losses which would render life unendurable. John was delighted that his efforts brought some of the group to tears and revealed he could only complete it as 'he' not 'I'.

Kate sent in a piece that described social madness madly. A mother could not cope with a daughter identifying as a dog, and a judge had to adjudicate between them once the dog became a daughter again. Kate described the many extensions of political correctness that had come and gone during the years. Her distrust of such correctness and of dogs shone through. We discussed the misbehaviour of many dog owners. And loved Kate's story.

Mike was detained by tasks at home
So couldn't join the gang
But submitted a poem for us
Which surely really sang
We admired the skill and humour
That gave us such good cheer
Like he was with us nearly
But we were sad he was not here.



Membership Renewal

It is that time of year again. The renewal for this year is still £12.00, which we hope you will think is good value as it has remained the same for a few years.

You will have received an email concerning renewal – those without email will be receiving a letter. The information in this email is copied below, together with the links. If you have questions concerning your membership, then contact the Membership Secretary. However, if you have difficulty logging on or accessing the portal, or other IT difficulties, then contact the Beacon administrator.

Membership Enquiries – members@chesteru3a.org.uk

Portal/Access/IT problems – beaconadmin@chesteru3a.org.uk

Dear Member

We are approaching the end of our membership year (31 August) so are inviting members to renew their subscriptions over the next few weeks.

We would ask all members, if at all possible, to renew using the Member's [MyPortal](#) at Chester u3a Member's Portal.

If you **have** already registered to access the Member's [MyPortal](#) using your email address, you can log on using the password you set.

If you **have not** yet registered for the Member's MyPortal, then you can use this link to set up your [My Portal](#) access. You will then need to confirm your identity by giving the following five pieces of information. Your details are written in the email that you receive and must be copied in **exactly** the same format as they appear in the email. (Take care not to add spaces before or after the information.).

Membership Number:

First Name:

Last Name:

Email:

Post Code:

You will then be asked to set a password.

Your portal access will then be set up.

After you have followed the instructions to create and validate your MyPortal account, you can renew your membership and pay using your debit or credit card.

If you are eligible for Gift Aid, please ensure you tick the appropriate box on the renewal form.

Your membership card will then be emailed to you. You can print it at home if you wish to have a printed card, but you may find it useful just to keep a copy of the image on your mobile device.

A video of the process can be seen by following the link below:

[Portal Video](#)



You can also find all the information on how to do all of the above on our website at Chester u3a membership renewal. [Renew your membership - Chester](#)

If you are struggling to set up access to our MyPortal, then you can pay by bank transfer. Payments can be made electronically to Chester U3A by one of several methods:-

1. Internet Banking
2. Telephone Banking
3. At your bank branch using your debit card.

Please ensure the following payment instructions are provided:-

Sort Code: 30 91 92

Account number: 59864768

Payment Reference: XXXX (your membership number)

If you have not already done so, you will need to instruct your bank to set up Chester u3a as a beneficiary before you can make the payment using the above details.

If you are renewing the membership of two members, please quote both the membership numbers in the payment reference. This will help us ensure that your membership is renewed effectively. We will then email your membership card to you.

Events during August

Grosvenor Museum – Two new exhibitions

- Catherine Taylor Parry: Earth Stories: Plwm Lead – exploring ways in which objects and their material properties are transformed by time, nature & physical forces – until 27th September
- Echoes of Ancient Lands and Seas: Fossils from Cheshire, exploring the geological history of Cheshire as it changed from jungle to desert to tropical seas – until 20th September

Chester Cathedral

- Kiosk by Wolfgang Weileder – to 31st August – an architectural sculpture constructed from reclaimed church pews that draws on the visual language of Islamic architecture
- Postcards from Rhyl photographic exhibition – to 31st August

Blue Plaques - Why not walk around Chester City centre looking for the [Blue Plaques](#)? You can find them listed on-line, by street – take a walk and find out more about our rich history



AGM and Help Needed

AGM

Each year Chester u3a has an Annual General Meeting in which the committee is elected for the following year. The 2026 AGM will be held at St Colomba's @ 10:30 am on 19/11/26 – this is at the start of the Monthly Meeting. All members are invited to attend. The committee has the following named posts, and members are encouraged to apply for any post.

- Chair¹
- Vice-Chair
- Treasurer¹
- Speaker Secretary¹
- Business Secretary
- Membership Secretary
- Groups Coordinator
- Social Secretary²

¹Chair, Treasurer, and Speaker Secretary will become vacant for next year, so we are eager to find replacements.

²There is currently no Social Secretary.

If you are interested in any post, then please reply to this email and I will send details of how to apply and put you in contact with a committee member with experience of the post.

Help needed

You may have no intention of applying to become a committee member but may still wish to help with running events for Chester u3a. **We welcome all help and are grateful to those people without whom the u3a could not run the activities that it does.** Help takes many forms such as:

- Helping to run a group
- Getting venues ready for meetings
- Making and serving tea and coffee
- Technical help with IT, projectors, videos, etc.
- Greeting people and showing them to seats
- Helping run trips
- Admin skills

So, if you are interested in giving any help then please let me know. Tell me what you might be willing to do, however small the task, and I will put you in contact with the appropriate people. If you have any special skill that may be useful to the u3a, then let me know.

Email the Business Secretary

businesssec@chesteru3a.org.uk



Answers to Cryptic Crosswords questions on p 6

1. Blusher
female = she, inside band Blur. Blusher adds colour to the face.
2. Nail polish
“out” = anagram indicator, anagram of Ian Hislop and the letter I (from left). Digital application is something you apply to digits (fingers) i.e. nail polish
3. Deodorant
“strangely” = anagram indicator, anagram of the words odd and ornate. Use of a deodorant makes a person more approachable.
4. Eyebrow pencil
“Eastenders” means drop the letter aitch, “on the radio” means sounds like, so intellectual (highbrow) becomes eyebrow. Writer = pencil. Eyebrow pencil highlights a facial feature
5. Kohl
winning blow = knock out KO in boxing, left hand = lh, back means reverse it, kohl adds black colour to the eye area
6. Conditioner
“Confusing” = anagram indicator, anagram of direction on, conditioner is found in bottles in the bathroom

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.

August	Picturehouse Tuesday 4th Wine Appreciation 1&2	St Columba's Thursday 20th Craft
September	Tuesday 1st Bus Buddies	Thursday 17th Cryptic Crosswords Current Affairs

The cut-off date for the next Chester Times is Thursday 20th August 2026.

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

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

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