



Chester Times

September 2026

u3a learn,
laugh,
live
Chester

Message from Fran Reading, Chair

A focus on the environment is important, and one of my friends has been encouraging me to go to a 'People's Emergency Briefing', a couple of which have been screened locally. With my hectic diary I was unable to find a suitable date/time. However, the u3a HQ have recently run a zoom session on the 'National Emergency Briefing' and I took advantage of being at home to watch, listen and learn. They selected four key presentations, followed by some discussion, and then directed us as to where to see the others. If you are interested, there is a '[National Emergency Briefing website](#)' where you can see all nine films – well worth finding out a bit more about nature, climate, food security, health, extreme weather and others. It is preferable to view the films and then take part in a discussion, but it is still worth seeing them on your own. One thing we don't have is a u3a nature/climate/community-type group to support local projects. If this is something you might be interested in setting up, let me know.

When I get the time, I do enjoy joining the u3a Online Events. These include lots of interesting presentations which you can enjoy in the privacy of your own home. September includes wild, edible autumn seeds, Danish conquests, drones, world faiths and promoting brain health. Sign up for their newsletter so you know what is going on and book your place.

<https://www.u3a.org.uk/what-we-do/events/educational-events>

I have also been busy this month watching the 'Theatre in the Park'. We are so lucky to have this facility, and even though we had no 'classics' this

year, I enjoyed The Outlaws, Let the Sun Shine and Nell Gwyn. To continue my theatre going I will be attending the new season at [Chester Little Theatre](#). If you liked Allo Allo, check out the theatre website. There are reduced tickets on Mondays for concessions! I spot quite a few of our members there so maybe see you as well.

I have also recently decided to take a bit more of an interest in artists and have discovered a series of books in the library called 'The Great Artists OR Art Masters' – just enough information, written in a relatable way and with different paintings included. My friend is an artist and I wish I had her talent for putting pen/paint to paper, but I don't, so reading about art and visiting galleries is my alternative. Following my recent trip to see The Odyssey, I have also been reading and listening to podcasts about the classics, including '[Natalie Haynes Stands up for the Classics](#)'. Give it a go on BBC sounds – there are about 100 episodes, so plenty to choose from.



"Natalie Haynes 20221208" by Edwardx is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.

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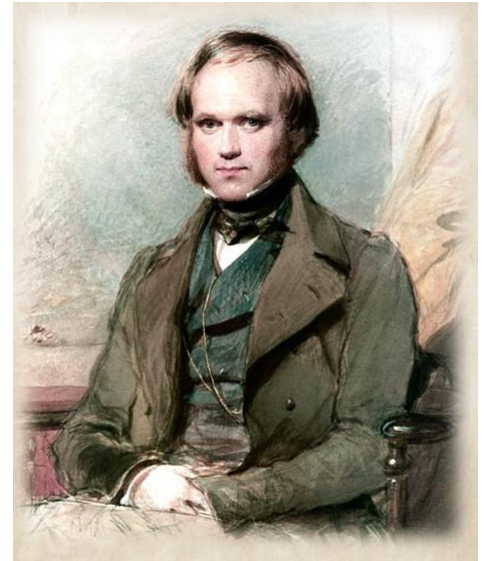


Tuesday 1st September. Picturehouse, 2.00 pm for 2.30pm start

Shaun Higgins: Snowing Butterflies

We are delighted to welcome back Oswestry actor and playwright Shaun Higgins, who has previously given us such memorable performances about Wilfred Owen and the Heroes of the First World War. *Snowing Butterflies* gives a glimpse of a young Charles Darwin, freshly returned from his voyage to South America aboard *The Beagle*. Inspired and eager to share his discoveries. This is a chance to meet the man behind the famous beard, and see the seeds being sown for his revolutionary theories.

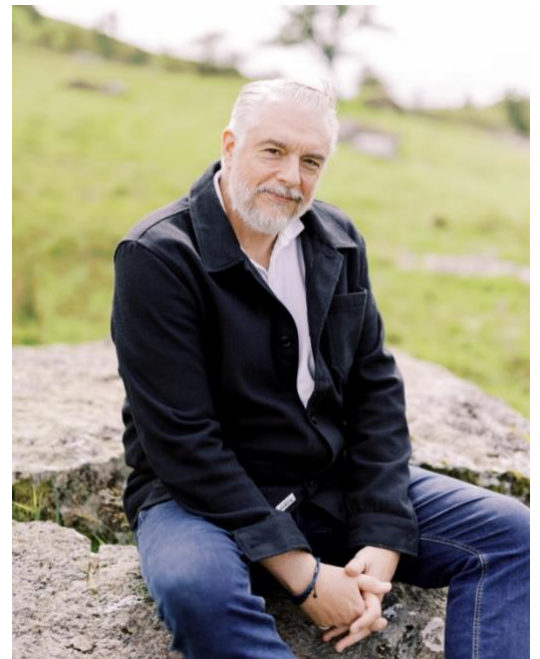
All seats for this event have now been booked. If you wish to be put on the waiting list, please contact Sue at speakersec@chesteru3a.org.uk
Please note that it will not be possible to provide refreshments at this event.



Thursday 17th September. St Columba's Church Hall, 10.00am for 10.30am

Simon McCleave: Life as a Crime Writer

Best-selling author Simon McCleave will talk about his writing career from television crime dramas to his bestselling crime thrillers. Simon is originally from London but now lives in North Wales. Before writing novels, he worked in television and film writing for popular dramas including *Silent Witness*, *Murder in Suburbia*, *Teachers*, *The Bill*, *Eastenders*, and many more. His debut novel *The Snowdonia Killings* (2020) sold over 600,000 copies and reached #1 on Amazon. It is the first in the bestselling DI Ruth Hunter novels, Wales' most popular crime series which has sold over 3.5 million copies.



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 August Monthly Meetings, by Diane Williams

August's talks offered two vivid accounts of lives shaped by history, place and family. In the first, Simon Seligman presented Deborah, Duchess of Devonshire — affectionately known as Debo — as the hospitable force who helped transform Chatsworth from an aristocratic inheritance into a living, thriving estate. Born in 1920, Debo was the youngest child in the famous Mitford family of six girls and one boy. Simon's admiration for her began in 1991, when he started what became 20 years of employment at Chatsworth House, and his respect for her was evident throughout.

In 1941, Debo married Andrew, younger son of the 10th Duke of Devonshire. He had not expected to inherit either the title or the estate, but in 1944 his elder brother was shot by a sniper, and Andrew became Duke when his father died in 1950. The family then faced a severe financial crisis: although the 10th Duke had transferred assets during his lifetime in the hope of avoiding death duties, he died a few weeks too early for the exemption to apply, leaving the estate with an 80% tax charge of £7 million. Andrew sold assets and transferred Hardwick Hall to the National Trust in lieu of tax, but he and Debo were determined to retain Chatsworth.

Their response was to turn the estate into a successful business while preserving its original purpose as a place of hospitality, making visitors feel not merely admitted, but genuinely welcome.

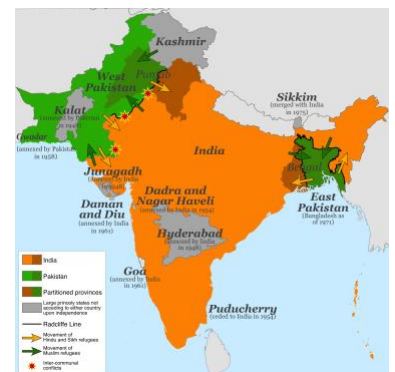
Within a year of her 90th birthday, Debo was affected by a severe form of dementia, and she died in 2014. The presence at her funeral of the then Prince of Wales, now Charles III, reflected the breadth of affection and respect she had inspired. It was a fitting close to a life remembered not only for rank and resilience, but for stewardship, warmth and the gift of making Chatsworth feel open to all.

The second August talk also explored family history against a wider historical backdrop. Chester u3a member Christine Milnes Holt used her family's story to illuminate the upheaval and human cost of the partition of India in 1947. She also explained that her life as an author began at

the age of five, inspired by Enid Blyton's *Secret Seven* stories.

That personal connection centred on Christine's father, John, who was born in Shimla in northern India in 1932 to a British father and an Anglo-Indian mother from the Punjab region. After partition, the family travelled to Lahore and from there secured passage to the UK: first to Karachi by train, then to Bombay on a four-day boat trip, and finally on a four-week sea journey to Liverpool, arriving at the end of October 1947.

Christine placed this family journey within the wider history of colonial rule in India and the rise of nationalist movements. Before partition, about a quarter of India's population was Muslim, and Muslim leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah argued for an independent state, Pakistan. The human consequences of this division were devastating: more than 1 million people were massacred, around 500,000 died in refugee camps from disease or starvation, and an estimated 14–15 million were displaced as Muslims moved to Pakistan and non-Muslims moved out of Pakistan.



"Partition of India 1947 en" by Own work is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.

Christine brought the story back to family history by explaining her fascination with her paternal grandmother's maiden name, Zimmerman. Her curiosity about why an Anglo-Indian family carried what sounded like a German surname led her to discover that this branch of the family had originated in Poland, moved to Denmark, and was Catholic. She has used her grandmother's maiden name, Caroline Zimmerman, as the title of her recently published novel, which draws on her family's story.

A Member Remembers: Fran Reading in conversation with Tony Austin

Music can be very important in your life, bringing back memories and reminding you of important people and happy times. This is certainly the case for Tony who has a passion for music of all kinds. Brought up within a wider family in Sunderland he has fond memories of listening to his grandmother playing the piano. In the 1960s he moved on to The Beatles and the Four Pennies and remembers being astonished that Eleanor Rigby was only a B-side. Later, classical music became an important part of his life involving many trips to classical concerts, especially at the Liverpool Phil where he is a regular attendee. He also really enjoys watching music on You Tube and said it is always amazing how many different interpretations there were of the same composition.

Tony didn't really enjoy school and was happy to leave at 16, becoming an articled clerk in an accountants' office. He admits he was shy and immature and being thrown into an office environment at that age was a challenge. However, he learnt to communicate with others, including external clients, and looking back realised this was an important life lesson. He initially trained in finance, but computing was in its infancy in work environments and Tony found that his logical mind, used to accountancy and auditing, was equally suited to IT work. His career took a different direction when he moved to a new job and travelled to the US to become acquainted with the computer systems of his new employer. There he learnt to identify how to adapt and use the American computer software in the UK. This proved to be a good choice which he continued to explore for the rest of his working life with various organisations. Tony continues to live in Chester in the same house he bought when, with his wife Pat and his three boys, he moved here from Sunderland in 1982.

Retirement brought new challenges, and Tony looked for opportunities including becoming a Welcomer at the Cathedral. It was an interesting role, meeting new people each time and ensuring

their visit to our city left them with fond memories. He supported the team with some help behind the scenes and was also very involved with the day to day running of the Lego project which raised over £200,000 for education projects (that's a lot of £1 bricks!)

Travel is important to Tony and his love of history (he is a member of Chester u3a history group) has been enhanced by extensive worldwide trips. He travelled to the USSR in 1972 (where he was nearly arrested for taking photos of the Lubyanka prison), Syria in 2007, which Tony says is one of the most interesting places to visit – historically, archaeologically and culturally - and most recently to Vietnam and Cambodia. He has also enjoyed many trips to France, having taken French evening classes (remember those!) and walking holidays to Austria, one of his favourite countries.

Tony is a cricket fan and makes an annual visit to the Oval with his son. He is a member of Local Vocals, an over-55s choir, and treasurer of the Evergreen Club for over 55s in Westminster Park. His other passion is Charles Dickens, reading Dickens' novels in sequence in 2012 to commemorate the bicentenary of Dickens' birth. He visited Restoration House in Rochester, the inspiration for Satis House, where Dickens' Miss Havisham lived.

Tony has been a member of Chester u3a for 15 years and hopes that at least one of his sons will follow in his footsteps. We agreed - no regrets (apart from that we should have learnt a musical instrument when younger!), go where fate takes you, meet new people and enjoy as many moments as you can.



Tony in Salzburg



Let's Celebrate!

For many u3a members, retirement is a time to pursue interests and develop talents that were put aside during their working lives. Today we are featuring Geraldine Hogan and Alex Tate, so that we can celebrate their very different achievements.

Geraldine, a member of the Birdwatching, Opera, Beer, and Wine groups, has also managed to fit in some mathematical studies. Recently she was awarded a master's degree in mathematics, with merit, by the Open University.

Alex, a member of the Current Affairs group, has always been active in politics and local government so her appointment as Deputy Lord Mayor of Chester is a fitting reward for her labours.

Well done, Geraldine and Alex!

If you or a friend or relative in Chester u3a have something to celebrate, please let us know.



Chester u3a Quiz

We continue our theme of celebrating achievements in 'advanced maturity'. All the people below are over 75 and still having an impact on the national or international scene. Can you identify them?

1. His 'Talking Heads' was a huge success on stage and screen.
2. He created 'The Bean' in Chicago.
3. She is considered to be the most hardworking member of the royal family.
4. The man behind the music in Jaws, Schindler's List, Jurassic Park, ET and so much more.
5. Planet Earth – need I say more?
6. Mother of the House before Diane Abbott and appointed as Adviser on Women and Girls in May 2026
7. He is building 'the biggest most beautiful ballroom.'
8. A memorable 'M' in several James Bond films
9. This Argentinian woman still does concert tours at the age of 85.
10. Guitarist, astro-physicist and animal rights campaigner remembered for his appearance on the roof of Buckingham Palace.

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Music Performing, by Joanna Dedrick

The group meets on the third Friday of the month (mornings) at St. Columba's Church, Upton to play a wide variety of music, selected by members.

The group has grown considerably in the last years, and now has about twenty members, including violinists, cellists, pianists, clarinetists, and guitarists. Within the group, there is a complete mixture of musical abilities, interests and backgrounds.

Between meetings, there are smaller meetings in members' homes to practise pieces that people wish to play at the main meeting.

The Friday meetings start with a couple of pieces for everyone to join in, followed by the pieces that have been prepared in smaller groups during the month. Music choices have recently ranged from classical, jazz and folk, and pieces are played either as duets or in small groups. In the last year, we have enjoyed Faure's Pavanne (string group), Bohemian Rhapsody (piano duet), a violin duet by Boccherini, Fantasie D.940 by Schubert (piano duet), I Know Him So Well by Lloyd Webber for strings/flute/ piano, 5 Bagatelles by Finzi (clarinet and piano), and many more.



The meetings usually end with a Beatles song for all to join in, followed by tea and coffee.



Involvement in playing may be as much or as little as members choose; some may prefer just to join in with the joint pieces, others may wish to be more involved in the small group playing. The group is relaxed and informal and the emphasis is on the enjoyment of playing.

In the last few months some members have played at two local lunch clubs as part of the entertainment session for these community groups.

New members are always welcome. If you would be interested in joining the group, please contact the group leader via the [website](#).



Answers to Chester u3a Quiz

1. Alan Bennett
2. Anish Kapoor
3. Princess Anne
4. John Williams
5. David Attenborough
6. Harriet Harman
7. Donald Trump
8. Judy Dench
9. Marta Argerich
10. Brian May

Social Psychology, by Joyce Halliwell

The social psychology group goes from strength to strength. We have had a varied and busy year. Last September (2025) we had eight members but after the Showcase at the Storyhouse, where we recruited new members, we had twelve. As we meet in a member's house, we are at full capacity. However, we do have a waiting list in case any of our members drops out. If you would like to be on this list, please let me know. Joyce at [social psychology](#).

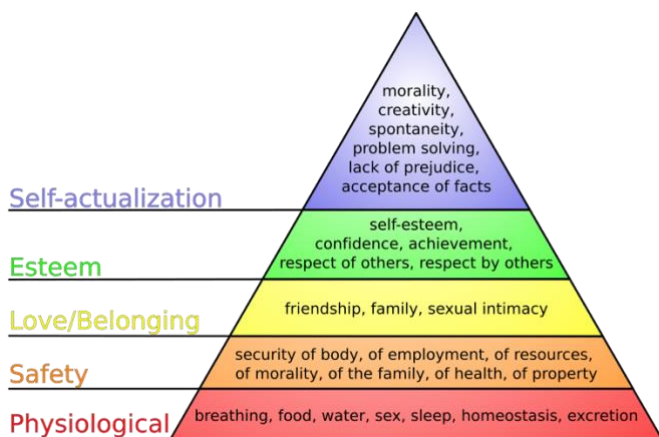
During the last twelve months we have discussed the following topics:

Is there a generation gap?

We had nine people at this meeting and discussed the different opinions and outlooks between one generation and another. These differences may relate to beliefs, politics, language, work, demographics and values.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

This is a motivational theory in psychology created by Abraham Maslow in the 1940s. It suggests humans are motivated to fulfil basic needs before moving on to other more advanced needs. The theory is usually shown as a five-level pyramid.



[Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs - Finkelstein CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

(In December we took a break and had a Christmas meal at a restaurant.)

Aggression

Social psychology defines it as any physical or verbal behaviour intended to hurt another person who does not want to be harmed. It separates

aggression from feelings like anger or attitudes like hostility, focussing instead on observable actions driven by intent to cause injury or emotional pain.

Nature vs Nurture

Nature vs Nurture explored whether human behaviour, personality and intelligence are shaped mostly by biology and genetics (nature) or by environment, upbringing and life experiences (nurture). Modern science shows both forces work together in a constant, complex interaction rather than acting alone.

Free Will

Free Will is the idea that humans can make their own choices and determine their own fates. Is a person's will free or are people's lives in fact shaped by powers outside their control? The question of free will has long challenged philosophers and religious thinkers, and scientists have examined the problem from psychological and neuroscientific perspectives as well.

The Poverty Cycle

Absolute poverty refers to a condition where a person does not have the minimum amount of income to meet the minimum for one or more basic living needs over an extended period of time.

Phobias

A Phobia is an intense, irrational fear of a specific object, animal or situation that goes far beyond any normal worry. A very lively discussion!

The Inner Child

The Inner Child is a psychological concept representing the child-like aspects of a person's subconscious. It holds early memories, unexpressed emotions and past hurts from childhood, as well as positive traits like creativity, wonder and joy.

I have been co-ordinating the group in my house. I hope you found these topics interesting and would like to go on the waiting list for a place in the group. You would be made to feel very welcome.

Friday Walkers, by Jeff Howard



On 14th August Mike Burke led ten of us on an eleven mile walk along part of the North Wales Pilgrim Way (although there was some discussion about the actual length!). There was a heritage-filled start to the walk from the ruins of the Cistercian abbey at Basingwerk, up through the remnants of water-powered cotton mills to Saint Winefride's Well. We made the steady climb above Holywell with stunning views of the Dee estuary then dropped down to the monastery at Pantasaph. We made the gradual descent through the villages of Gorsedd, Lloc and Whitford, joining the coastal footpath at the Abakhan craft centre and then back to the carpark.

It was a most enjoyable walk, and Mike had arranged several stops including one with flapjacks provided by another member of the group (thanks Gerry). During a walk through a wood we noticed a "Chicken of the Woods". Apparently, this is an edible fungus with rather worrying cooking instructions, "It must be thoroughly cooked to avoid reactions from individual mushroom allergies and undercooking....common symptoms range from mild to intense. Tingling or numbness in the lips is the mildest symptom, but nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea are common if the person has an allergy to the mushroom." We left it growing peacefully on the tree!

If you would like to join us on a future walk, then contact Jeff Howard via the website ([Friday Walking](#)). Our walks tend to be about ten miles (16km), quite often with a significant amount of ascent.



Photograph by Marion Betts



Chicken of the Woods by Marion Betts

Note to Contributors

Many thanks to everyone who sends items for inclusion in Chester Times, whether you are a regular contributor or whether you send an occasional item.

You don't need to worry about any formatting of your text. That is all dealt with by the editors. What IS important concerns any photos that you want to include. If they were taken on a phone, you may be offered the option to choose the quality when sending the file. If so, always go for the largest file size possible, so that the quality is the best available. NB Not all phones offer this option, so in that case you don't need to worry about it.

Can you also check the copyright terms covering any pictures you send if they are not your own?



Events during September 2026

Grosvenor Museum – they are offering a series of talks/discussions called 'Meet the Artists'. Drop in to the exhibition gallery to meet artists from Cheshire Artists Network and see them working on new pieces. Check the museum website for the programme. <https://events.westcheshiremuseums.co.uk>

Heritage Open Days – 11th – 20th September. Check out their website to see what is going on in Chester, Cheshire & the Wirral. Booking is required for many events but there are lots of interesting buildings open and fascinating talks. Take a look at <https://www.heritageopendays.org.uk>

Chester Cathedral – 1st to 24th September – 'In the Depth' with the subtitle 'Water and Sky Unite' is the exhibition of poems, photographs and paintings inspired by Water, reflecting on our relationship with nature and how we can protect our planet. <https://chestercathedral.com>

Storyhouse - Reel Talks Afternoons – on the third Thursday of every month there is a special matinee screening of the latest cinema release, followed by a relaxed group discussion in the Meeting Room hosted by a member of the Storyhouse Cinema team. Come along and share your thoughts and feelings about the film. This is a joint group with Chester u3a and is free to attend, but spaces are limited, so reserve your place in advance, or when buying your cinema ticket. Check out the Storyhouse website to see the film which will be discussed. <https://www.storyhouse.com>

The cut-off date for the next Chester Times is Monday 20th September 2026.

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

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