



Chester Times

October 2026

u3a learn,
laugh,
live
Chester

Message from Fran Reading, Chair

It feels as if we are coming out of the summer and everything is starting up again after the break. I have been to the first show at The Chester Little Theatre – *Allo Allo 2*, and very good it was too. I am planning on going to the Riverside Museum next month as they restart their monthly talks about nursing/health – always interesting and in a city-centre building. I am also exploring the Liverpool theatres this month. Shockingly, after over 30 years in Chester, I have never been to any Liverpool theatre, so am going on a theatre-spree this month.

Last month's Showcase at Storyhouse gave me lots of ideas about possible groups to join if I get bored, although with Joy of Reading, Local History and History I am getting plenty of 'learning, laughing and living' as per the u3a motto. We are about to choose our history topics for 2027. I always try to contribute by doing a presentation as part of the programme. I really enjoy the research, and although giving the talk can be a bit scary, isn't challenging yourself what you're meant to do? The local history group has been focusing on leisure activities in Chester, with swimming, cinema, libraries, racing and tourism amongst our topics.

Last month I also took advantage of the Heritage Open Days across Chester – inside the lead shot tower and military museum, a tour around the Bluecoat School, a look at quirks and curiosities which we all walk past every day, talks about local history over 2000 years and a trip into the Chapter

House of St John's - many hidden places which you get access to once per year.

Amongst my many visits to the cinema I watched a film called *Pressure* about World War 2 and the importance of weather forecasting. I expect after this summer, weather is something on everyone's mind going forward – will we have too much heat, storms, too little rain. It made me think of my A Level Geography syllabus and my Guide Weatherman badge – nimbus, cirrus, stratus and cumulus clouds – might get a library book to see what I can

remember. This photo is part of my Guide badge collection;

which can you remember?

Clockwise from the bottom:

Challenge, Emergency Helper,

First Aid, Laundress (!!),

Weatherman, Firefighter,

Homemaker (!!), Accident Prevention and Queen's

Guide – definitely a focus on emergencies!



Finally, my husband's favourite day – 19th Sept – 'Talk like a Pirate Day'!! If you missed it in 2026, in 2027 enjoy entertaining your friends with *Ahoy Matey* and *Shiver me Timbers*, and if you feel so inclined, dress up with eye patches, stripy shirts or even full pirate costumes. It's a pity the Black Pearl at New Brighton is no more!



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Tuesday 6th October. Picturehouse, 2pm for 2.30pm

Juliet Leadbeater: Where have all the wild things gone?

Chester u3a member Juliet Leadbeater will tell us about the UK's nature crisis and how we can fix it. Our wildlife is disappearing for a multitude of reasons such as climate change, habitat loss and pollution. Loved animals such as red squirrels, hedgehogs and hazel dormice are threatened with extinction. Economic losses could be devastating if we lose pollinating insects. Nature can recover dramatically if it is given a chance. How can individuals help?



Thursday 15th October. St Columba's Church Hall, 10am for 10.30am

Roger Browne: The King's Tiger Rag

We are delighted to welcome back Roger Browne, who has previously entertained us with excellent talks about Scott Joplin and the music of the Gershwin brothers. This time he will be telling us the strange story of the role that King George V played in bringing traditional jazz to Britain in 1919 with The Original Dixieland Jazz Band, how society in Britain was never to be the same again, and the unlikely link with Queen Mary's Needlework Guild. His talk will be illustrated with live playing, on piano, of the ODJB's greatest hits.



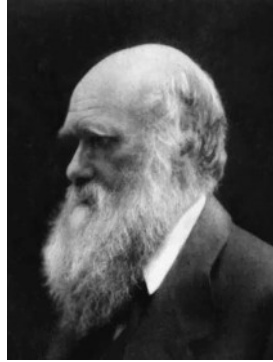
Credit: Wikimedia Commons, author unknown

Roger has appeared in jazz clubs and festivals all over the world and provided piano accompaniment for many national and international legends.

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

Report on the September Monthly Meetings, by Diane Williams

On 1st September we were carried back to 28th January 1839 for an address by the young naturalist Mr Charles Darwin, whose account brought vivid colour to the life and voyage already winning scientific attention. It was most obliging of him to spare us his time on the eve of his marriage.



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Mr Darwin described his early life as the son of the wealthy Dr Darwin, who expected him to become a doctor. Medical school proved too distressing, and his next placement, Cambridge University, which was intended to prepare him for the Church, instead brought him under the influence of the botany professor John Stevens Henslow.

Soon after Cambridge, Professor Henslow proposed him as naturalist on HMS *Beagle* under Captain FitzRoy. His father's objections were overcome by his uncle, Josiah Wedgwood II, and the voyage began on 27th December 1831.

Mr Darwin then greatly entertained us with tales of his journey to exotic, faraway lands. These included Brazil, where he delighted in exploring the rainforest and learning from the local gauchos, the Falkland Islands, the Galapagos Islands, Tahiti and Australia. In Australia, he was so much struck by two animals in particular – the rat-kangaroo and the platypus – that he thought it was almost as if two distinct Creators had been at work, a remark which showed how powerfully the natural world had stirred his curiosity. Although he had been writing letters to Professor Henslow about his discoveries throughout the voyage, for a year he had no replies, until the ship reached South Africa, where he learned that his professor had published extracts from his letters in a pamphlet, thereby bringing him to the attention of leading naturalists.

The voyage concluded on 2nd October 1836. Once home, Mr Darwin began to consider marriage and, after making a list of its advantages and disadvantages, proposed to his cousin, Emma

Wedgwood. She accepted, and the wedding took place the day after his visit to Chester.

We look forward to future appearances by Mr Darwin's alter ego, Shaun Higgins, whose presentation made the past seem agreeably present.

We then returned to the 21st century for our second meeting, when Simon McCleave described his life as a North Wales crime novelist, from self-publishing *The Snowdonia Killings* in the hope of selling a dozen copies to achieving 3.5 million sales across his novels. His storytelling ambition began with Enid Blyton's *Secret Seven* books, and at 19 his play based on the true story of Derek Bentley was staged at the Edinburgh Festival.



During the 1990s, he worked as a script editor, mainly in London with a brief spell in Hollywood, before writing for TV series such as *The Bill*. Working on *The Bill* gave him the opportunity to spend five days with police officers in London, gaining insight into the relationships between officers who work together, and their police cars, where they can talk to each other in complete confidence.

About 18 years ago, he and his wife moved from London to North Wales, where he retrained as a secondary school teacher – “the best job in the world”, he said. But the urge to tell stories remained, and he realised that Snowdonia offered an ideal setting for a murder mystery. This instinct proved right: the success of *The Snowdonia Killings* meant that he no longer had to self-publish, and he now has about 40 books to his name. He currently has a police television series based in Wrexham in development for Michael Sheen's company. Asked by an audience member which book had been hardest to write, he said it was *Five Days in Provence*, because it moves between time periods.

Information about all his books is available at www.simonmccleave.com/books/.

A Member Remembers: Fran Reading in Conversation with Tony Hurst

Usually when I ask for a photo for an article, people get stuck finding something which reflects their life – not in Tony's case. He has done so many amazing things that I was spoilt for choice – sailing down the Great Glen and Loch Ness, dodging the *Queen Mary* whilst taking his Skippers Certificate on the Solent, sailing around Turkey and Greece every summer, paddleboarding down the Grand Canyon, cycling in Vietnam or windsurfing at West Kirby! All these activities take a lot of planning and energy, but they certainly keep Tony fit and his enthusiasm for life comes across in everything he does.



Tony has lived most of his life in the Chester area after being born in the Hoole Maternity Hospital – his mum was a nurse, and his dad, an industrial chemist, put the lead in petrol!! He went to Helsby County Grammar School for Boys, and, at 18, being undecided about what to do, did a degree at Keele University in Physics and Philosophy with other subsidiaries – it sounded like a really interesting choice and a very broad education, although he found the Philosophy of Mathematics very challenging. Keele was also where some of his classes took place in a building with secret staircases and suits of armour.

After university he returned to Chester and has been based around Cheshire ever since – at British Nuclear Fuels at Capenhurst for 12 years (where he used a bike to get from one end of the building to the other), with the Atomic Energy Authority for 10 years (where he worked on risk assessments across a wide range of industries), and then in his own business, working in risk and safety management. He gave me a huge list of interesting projects he had been involved in all over the world – working with rocket scientists at the European Space Agency to identify risk on a 330 million ECU space mission,

being part of a multi-national team at Chernobyl to identify what action to take after the disaster, supporting changes in a very unionised environment at Ansett airlines in Australia (where he also held the Olympic torch), supporting risk management for the Heathrow train link, Waterloo International and London's £250 million railway infrastructure project and risk management across nuclear installations for various companies and authorities.



Travelling across the world, including USA, South Africa, Europe and China, as well as managing all parts of your own company with a business partner, was challenging, interesting and exciting, but 5 years ago Tony decided to retire and spend more time with his partner, Louise, their cats, his two daughters (one of whom has worked at Downing St with Larry the Cat!), and spend more time on hobbies and holidays. Tony's sitting room must be quite full as he has an old church organ (with bent pipes to make it fit) and a grand piano from Chester Cathedral. He wanted to push the piano to his home via the city centre – unfortunately he was defeated within seconds by the cobbles in Abbey Square! He is a keen tennis player, meeting Louise at Chester Lawn Tennis Club 20 years ago. She runs our craft group, and luckily loves all Tony's adventurous hobbies as well.

Tony volunteers at Hoole Over 55's club, serving lunch, giving talks and on occasion turning his hand to Bingo calling! He also supports IT buddies for those who get in a pickle with phones/computers and loves playing chess – you might even see him outside the Visitors Centre looking for a challenger. He is a member of Chester u3a's Science and Wine Appreciation groups. Really interesting to talk to (we were there for two hours), and a great asset to all the communities he is part of. Long may his enthusiasm and zest for life continue!



Wine Appreciation 3, by Julia Hall

We set up our group in January of this year when groups 1&2 were fully subscribed. Initially there were four members, but we are pleased to say that our group is now full.

We meet once a month in someone's house for a glass or two of wine, nibbles, a chat and lots of laughter.

We have a theme for each month and everyone brings a bottle. The host chooses the theme and provides the nibbles.

We are a very jolly sociable group who like wine, but in the main are not connoisseurs, and we all look forward to our monthly get togethers.



U3a Members' Quiz

We have come back to doing a current affairs quiz this month. We hope you enjoy it. You can find the answers on page 7.

1. Who won the Special Recognition Award at this year's National Television Awards?
2. Andy Burnham took part in which recent charity run?
3. Which TV presenter has announced he will be leaving a gardening show after over 20 years?
4. Which famous singer has had a group of insects named after her?
5. The Royal Mint has released special coins to celebrate 20 years of which West End musical?
6. Which popular Japanese game has celebrated its 30th birthday recently?
7. Which country is currently trying to become an associate member of the EU?
8. Which tennis player who has Type 1 diabetes has won two grand slam tournaments this year?
9. Who is the British Paralympic cyclist and former swimmer on the new *Strictly Come Dancing*?
10. Which lake has Donald Trump said is to be renamed Lake America?

Earth Science, by Sue Hannon

We meet once a month in Handbridge and our members give talks or show DVD's about Earth Science. This is the study of planet earth, its systems, its materials and its place in the universe. We look at the oceans, formation of the land, the stars, the weather and our affect on the environment.

Over the past year, members have given short talks on subjects as varied as:

Talc, its sources, how it's mined and uses; the stones in my wife's necklace; agate nodules and how they are formed; iron pyrites; Yellowstone National Park; an exhibition on local geology at the Grosvenor Museum; The Great Wall of China.

Here is a summary of a talk by David Nichols on the Morecambe Bay gas fields:

Initial drilling began in 1969, which came to nothing, but started again in 1974, this time resulting in the find of one trillion cubic feet of recoverable gas. The strata bearing the gas were formed 210 million years ago, consisting mainly of sandstones and siltstones. At this time, north-west Europe was much further south with semi-arid conditions. The gas-water contact was approximately 3000ft, creating many challenges when developing a drilling schedule. The field was then divided in two, North Morecambe Bay Field and South Morecambe Bay Field. Conventional drilling of the South field would require seven platforms, but a new method of slant drilling reduced this to three. Gas from the South field moves through a 36-inch pipeline to a terminal at Barrow-in-Furness. Initially, high pressure allowed natural flow but by 1992 compression was needed so two Rolls-Royce turbine compressors were added. Gas from the North Field is sent separately to a different terminal. Heysham harbour served as the main office and support base due to



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24-hour access and proximity to motorways, unlike Barrow-in-Furness which has tidal restrictions and complex road access. Several small gas fields were developed later with

their gas being processed at Barrow. Although all the fields are now declining with some de-commissioned, there is a proposal to repurpose the fields for carbon capture.

Geoff Chamberlain gave a presentation on the Buncefield Gas Explosion:

On 11th December 2005, at 6.01am the UK's largest explosion since World War 2 occurred at the Buncefield fuel storage site in Hemel Hempstead. Around 300 tons of gasoline



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accidentally overflowed from a storage tank creating a 400m diameter vapour cloud across the site. The cloud ignited after about 23 minutes. A fast flame ripped through the surrounding area devastating buildings, parked cars, vegetation and other storage tanks. Fires lasted for several days. Fortunately no-one was killed, although there were some minor injuries.

A Major Incident Investigation Board (MIIB), chaired by Lord Newton, was set up by the UK Government and asked Geoff to set up an investigation team of experts to advise on the explosion mechanism. The team recommended a series of test programmes and computer-modelling studies which were successfully carried out in the UK and Norway. These studies, published in 2014, concluded that the most likely scenario was that an initial deflagration, caused by an electric spark in the site's pump house, transitioned into a detonation when the flame travelled through dense vegetation adjoining the site. A gas detonation is a worst-case outcome of ignition of a vapour cloud. It generates strong shock waves travelling at around 2 km/s and continues throughout the flammable cloud.

The MIIB made many recommendations to improve the safety of storage sites following the incident.

I hope this inspires you to discover our planet with all its secrets. and also the impact that humans are having, be it good or bad.



AGM and Help Needed

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 at 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 of them.

- 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 email me 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 Quiz on p 5

1. Alan Carr
2. The Great North Run
3. Monty Don
4. Taylor Swift
5. Wicked
6. Pokemon
7. Canada
8. Alexander Zverev
9. Dame Sarah Storey
10. Lake Ontario



Events during October

Riverside Museum – 7th October, 4pm. If you missed the u3a talk earlier in the year, catch **Chantal Bradburn** talking about art and medicine in the aftermath of the First World War

Grosvenor Museum – to 17th January 2027 – The Worst Record Covers in the World exhibition. The exhibition is a collection of dreadful record sleeves that makes people giggle, guffaw and double up laughing everywhere it goes. <https://events.westcheshiremuseums.co.uk>

Storyhouse – 12th to 16th October. Elders Festival – a variety of activities either free or pay-what-you-can, including Chester Football Club on screen, Community Arts Project and Singing the Blues. Check their website for more details <https://www.storyhouse.com>

Wesley Church lunchtime concerts – taking place at Wesley Church take place every Tuesday from 12.45 till 1.30pm, finishing just in time to walk to Picturehouse on the 1st Tuesday of the month and catch our meeting and speaker <https://www.wesleychester.co.uk/>

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

Please send contributions to: chestertimes@chesteru3a.org.uk or: Chester u3a,
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