Chester Times

November 2026

Message from Fran Reading, Chair

So, here goes. My last 'chair's message' for Chester Times. I can't believe that the last two years have gone so quickly. I have been kept very busy but have really enjoyed everything I have been involved in. The committee have been brilliant and have supported me along the way, including organising some great talks and showcases, ensuring the group leaders become more of a part of what we do and, of course, making sure that the quality of the chocolate biscuits at talks is up to standard! U3a is all about 'learn, laugh, live' and I have definitely done that.

Those of you who know me have probably guessed that I won't now be spending my evenings sitting down in front of the TV, but I shall have time to read even more, watch more films, visit local places and catch up with friends. I suspect my coffee and cake bill will increase substantially. I will spend more time looking into my passion for local history, concentrating on Foregate Street and Frodsham Street. Most of the literature, and photos, tends to focus on the main parts of the city centre, so I might have to work a bit harder to discover things. Thank goodness the archive is opening on 13th January 2027! I have been lucky enough to meet some u3a members who remember Chester in the 1930-80's (the bit I am missing), so I shall be picking a few brains for local stories. As I always say – write it down before it gets forgotten.

It's worth taking a look at the report **'u3a and Me'** which can be accessed through Chester u3a website. Here are some statistics from the u3a member survey: What's the downside?



- 95% say being a member has improved their life in some way
- 90% say u3a has given them opportunities to keep learning and stay curious
- 79% say being a member has expanded their social connections

As the survey highlights, communication is vital. We all want to know what is going on. As part of my second to last committee meeting, we discussed **Chester Times** – what you want to know about, who reads it and why, who doesn't read it and why and possible new articles. Our two editors, Joyce and Gwen, work so hard to ensure it is a great read. Please let us have any ideas for future editions. The other area where we communicate to members is via our **Chester u3a website**. Peter and Joan do a brilliant job keeping it up to date – are there any suggestions to make it even better?

Finally, after the AGM I shall say goodbye to my u3a t-shirt and badge, and, of course, my u3a sash! **Thank you again for all your support – I couldn't have done it without you.**



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Tuesday 10th November. Picturehouse, 2.00 pm for 2.30pm start

Please note that this meeting will be on the second Tuesday of the month

Jim Holmes: Life as a Documentary Photographer

For 40 years Jim Holmes has travelled to the least visited parts of the globe to produce stories of hope and resilience as a photojournalist. This personal travelogue, through the communities met, stories shared and experiences lived, will shine a spotlight on the riches and diversity that this world has to offer. With images drawn from throughout his career and recollections of quirky tales and scary moments, Jim will offer advice for budding photographers and travellers that result from a life spent behind the lens.





Thursday 19th November. St Columba's Church Hall, 10.00am for 10.30am

This meeting with begin with the Chester u3a AGM

Lynda Coulter: Donor human milk banking: The birth and growth of a local nurse-led healthcare initiative

Lynda will talk about her 14-year journey to establish a Human Milk Bank facility at the Countess of Chester Hospital. Donor human milk banking is not a new idea. The precursor was wet nursing, but the dangers of disease transmission ended this practice in the developed world and led to the first Human Milk Bank (HMB) being set up in 1909 in Vienna. The emergence of HIV in the 1980's raised new fears and resulted in the closure of virtually all HMBs until reliable blood tests were developed for HIV and other conditions in lactating mothers. While the practice received approval by NICE in 2010, it is still not an NHS service *per se*, although accepted by many (though not all) paediatric consultants. The talk should be of interest to anyone interested in healthcare promotion - or indeed anyone who has been involved in bringing up a child.

Cheshire & North Wales
Human Milk Bank
A Bank for Life

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

Report on the October Monthly Meetings, by Fran Reading and Peter Goodhew

Where have all the wild things gone, Juliet Leadbeater

Do you know where the wild things are in our local area? Well, if you came to Juliet's talk you would have discovered lots of interesting facts. I think most members had little idea that on our doorstep we had beavers, greater-crested newts, water voles, white-faced darters and a grey seal breeding ground. This is excellent news, as we know the global wildlife population has shrunk by 73% in 50 years, so anything being done to restore nature is a positive move.



Grey Seal - Public Domain

Juliet headed her talks under some wonderfully alliterative words – Wonderful Woodlands, Restful Rivers, Beautiful Bogs, Charismatic Coasts and Gorgeous Gardens, and gave us local examples of them all. It was not just about individual species – it is important to link the nature areas, which is something being done by the Northern Forest, and in a smaller way, by making holes in our fences so hedgehogs can get through to other gardens.

Juliet talked about the importance of charities and named Woodland Trust, Cheshire Wildlife Trust, RSPB, RHS, National Trust and Surfers against Sewage as some of a wide network who work hard to keep our green spaces growing and developing. Some of these charities have been instrumental in transforming the woodland areas around Frodsham golf course, getting Sandy Lane bathing water status, increasing the water vole populations, working with the council on Health Walks (many available in an area near you), ensuring the water depth is just right at Burton Mere for the waders, reintroducing beavers to Hatchmere in order to reduce flooding, supporting the breeding of grey seals at the Little Orme and monitoring the Marine Conservation Zones off our coasts.

So, what can you do? Live sustainably, garden for wildlife (flowers, trees, ponds, compost heaps, wood piles), support charities, campaign or write to your MP about things which are of concern to you and most of all – Enjoy Nature – it's good for you!

Jazzing it up, Roger Browne

St Columba's resounded with jazz chords on Thursday 15th as Roger Browne told the story of how this allegedly sinful style of music became accepted in the UK. His story took us (and Nick LaRocca and his Dixieland Jazz Band) from the levees of New Orleans to eventual applause at Buckingham Palace. Roger illustrated his talk with piano excerpts from many pieces such as Tiger Rag and the Livery Stables Blues. Those wanting more salacious stories about these Blues will have to ask someone who heard Roger's anecdotes at the meeting.



The Original Dixieland Jazz Band - Public Domain

A Member Remembers: Fran Reading in conversation with Marian Hadlow

I can't imagine living without running water, flushing toilets, electricity or using earth closets and oil lamps, but Marian's parents experienced this in a rural setting in the 1920-30s. Their move to Newton in 1935 meant the luxury of a bathroom and inside toilet as well as electric power at the touch of a switch. Marian made weekly visits to grandparents, helping her grandmother who was caretaker at Manley Village Hall, the centre of all village activities. Marian remembers her grandmother sweeping up piles of cigarette butts after events - smoking was the norm in those days.

Life in the Cheshire countryside meant scavenging for blackberries, field mushrooms and gathering nuts in Delamere Forest. Marian's father used to shoot rabbits on the smallholding. This was for food, and the pelts went to the Stockport Felt Hat industry. The hand-milked dairy cows were of mixed breeds - some provided larger quantities whilst others gave richer milk. On cattle market day in Chester cows were driven from Lightfoot Street in Hoole, over Hoole Bridge to the auction market situated where the bus station is today. From time to time a fairground appeared at that site. Until at least 1950, horse carts regularly used Hoole Bridge to transport and deliver coal and it was fun to watch the working canal barges going under Cow Lane Bridge.

Marian remembers weekly gas-mask practice at school and moving for safety to the school air raid shelter. Two evacuees were assigned to live with her parents. They were Henry and Herbert, both German-Jewish boys. Eva, from Prague, lived nearby with foster parents. She had been brought to England via the Kinder train. Marian and Eva loved exploring Hoole on their bicycles and they visited the zoo, which was still very much in its infancy. They often went to the St John Street library, using the Hoole Circular bus-service to Town Hall Square, and then, en route to the library, exploring the cathedral. In 1947 the family put their car back on the road after the war, and drove to Broadstairs, via London, sustaining at least six punctures. They stopped on the way at Green Park, leaving their car full of luggage and unattended whilst they went for a walk – not what you would do today!



Marion relaxing with needlework

Her first teaching job was at a small church school which had one head teacher and one assistant. The school had open fires for heating and earth closets for outside toilets. After a year Marian moved to Barrow School which provided for children up to the age of 15, as Christleton School had not yet opened. Marian's hobbies at that time included Scottish dancing, rambling, sailing, gardening and handicrafts. She also liked doing woodwork and pottery at evening classes which are much missed now.

Marian has always enjoyed walking and sailing and was often torn between the two clubs as their meetings coincided. She met and married Alan, had two children and enjoyed twenty-one years of marriage. During this time, they enjoyed caravanning and travelled extensively in Great Britain. Sadly, Alan died in 1988. Returning to the rambling club, Marian realised she still knew many people from twenty years ago, including Barry, who she married two years later. They walked with one of Frodsham's five Probus groups – so many Probus groups owing to the number of voluntary redundancies happening at the time.

Marian has settled into a retirement village and is meeting new people. She continues gardening in her daughter's garden, swimming occasionally, doing needlework in a Chester u3a group, and enjoying coffee mornings, film-evenings and games of Scrabble with like-minded friends. However, she has been saddened at the loss of so many friends. Her secret of a long life? Keeping busy and interested and inheriting good genes.



Holidaying in Ullapool

Chester u3a Quiz

There are several shops, pubs and roads in Chester named after birds, animals or reptiles Can you identify them from the clues?

1. A Caribbean restaurant outside the market?
2. So named because there was a cattle market where the bus station now stands.
3. Sounds as if the animal in this coffee shop is in high spirits.
4. A misspelt intrusive bird that specialises in cocktails.
5. Originally the townhouse of the Earls of Shrewsbury and now one of the most famous old pubs in Chester with an alliterative name.
6. One of our closest relatives and also a bar and canteen.
7. Pachyderm in Watergate Street
8. This bird of prey at a Chester crossroads was bought by Sir Richard Grosvenor in 1602
9. Who are Digby and Champ and where can you find their outlet?
10. Specialist bar and bottle shop in Rufus Court

Events during November 2026

Riverside Museum – open **1 – 4 p.m.** on **4th November,** followed by a free talk at **4 p.m.** on **'Diabetes Prevention, Care and Research in the German Democratic Republic, 1949-1990'.** Part of a series of talks on the first Wednesday of the month at Riverside campus

Grosvenor Museum – **24th November – Artists Talks –** a free talk on **'Visual Language' 2.30-3.30 p.m.** This is part of the Grosvenor Museum's 'Meet the Artists' events and talks, in conjunction with the Cheshire Artists Network

Storyhouse – **5th - 17th November. Exhibition celebrating 100 years of rural campaigning** – This exhibition showcases the winners and runners up from Campaign for Rural Protection Cheshire's photography competition. The photographs in this exhibition reflect CPRE's key campaigns over the years.

Chester Cathedral – **Katharine** – from **10th to 14th November -** An immersive and intimate performance inspired by Katharine of Aragon. This production strips away the spectacle of the Tudor court to reveal the pulse of the woman beneath the crown. Through a masterful blend of text, innovative binaural soundscapes, and live performance, experience Katharine's devotion, defiance, and resilience. **Tickets cost £15 -** available from the cathedral



Katharine of Aragon - Public Domain

Chester u3a Showcase and Chester u3a Goes Green!

Why take part in National u3a week? – the recent national u3a survey, **u3a and Me** (available on our website) shows how important the u3a is to our members, so we decided to share what we do with a wider community through our Showcase. This year we went bigger, and better, and it proved a great success.

What is the Groups Showcase? In the morning we held a drop-in event when members and prospective members could chat to group leaders representing some of our 90 plus groups and find out a bit more about Chester u3a. This year's event generated an increased interest from members wishing to join groups and from people interested in becoming new u3a members.

Why do afternoon of talks? Being green seems to be a theme important to many of our members and we had a great turnout for the programme of five short talks aimed at a general audience in the Garret Theatre on the theme u3a Goes Green! We were trying to present a general programme, different from the normal recycling and eco talks, sharing interesting and thoughtful information from our members and other locals.

Who came and what did they talk about?

- **Chester Zoo** – Chris gave us an interesting insight into the Zoo's wildlife work and focussed on their flagship **Networks for Nature** initiative funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.
- **Repair Café** - Martin and Helen, both members of Chester and District Friends of the Earth, volunteer regularly at the monthly Repair Café which is held at Hoole Community Centre. They explained to the audience why we have repair cafés and the impact they are having, before talking about Chester's own repair café.
- **How Green are your reading choices** – Liz, a Chester u3a member, encouraged us to think about where our reading materials come from and whether print or digital is the greener option.
- **Access to Land** - Helen and Carol, u3a members, explored the struggles over access to land and the countryside in the past and how these struggles still exist today. They also highlighted the work of Octavia Hill, one of the founders of the National Trust. One of her main concerns was the availability of open spaces for poor people.
- **The Life of an Organic Farmer** - Dianna gave us a lively and witty insight into the life of an organic farmer, including how crops are grown and animals are kept, and the principles behind working with nature.

Next steps – You could check out the Networks for Nature website at www.chesterzoo.org/conservation-science-education/global-conservation-programmes/conservation-campaigns/networks-for-nature

or visit the Hoole Repair Café at www.chesterfoe.co.uk

We would like to thank all participants who contributed their time, knowledge and enthusiasm to make the event such a success. We look forward to welcoming you at future u3a events.



Chester u3a trip to Market Drayton and Boscobel House, by Ruth Shaw

In September 40 members of Chester u3a visited Market Drayton and Boscobel House. Our coach passed a sign outside Market Drayton which said "Home of Ginger." That claim stems from the success of local lad Robert Clive better known as Clive of India. Ginger became widely available in the UK due to the success of the East India Company where Clive had a prominent role. Canny people used their local link to capitalise on this, producing and selling many edible foodstuffs containing ginger.

We got off our coach at the bottom of Cheshire Street where the main Wednesday market stalls were set out. The monks of nearby Combermere Abbey had been selling their ale in the town of Drayton years before 1245 when King Henry III gave the town its market status, thus changing the name. However, a market had been taking place way before 1245 in the church yard of St. Mary's Parish Church after the Sunday service! This did not go down well with the Pope who banned the practice in 1201. The stall holders simply moved down the street.

Some of us visited St. Mary's church which is obviously a thriving place of worship. Front pews have been taken out to house the music group, and sound systems/screens installed for less agile members. The oldest part of the present building is the Norman main doorway dated 1150AD. A 16th century spiral staircase appears to go nowhere, but it would have reached the now non-existent gallery. We were welcomed into the church and invited to ask questions, all of which appeared to be answered by some extremely knowledgeable people. Robert Clive reportedly climbed out on to one of the gargoyles when attending the nearby Old Grammar School in the 1730s.

Not far from the church is Joules Brewery. Their beer was the first to be exported to the USA and is recorded as stock on the Titanic. However, Bass Charrington managed to gain control of Joules in the 1960s by persuading an old, confused family widow to sell her shares. Brewery workers were put out on the street and Joules Brewery demolished. Happily, a family member was able to buy the business back in 2009. The brewery you see today is modern. Anyone wishing to sample ale brewed by Joules can do so via a visit to the Cross Keys Pub in Lower Bridge Street, Chester.

Our coach then took us to Boscobel House, an extremely old fragile building and a fantastic testament to the conservation work of English Heritage. It was this house in September 1651 that Charles II sought refuge in after the Royalist defeat at the battle of Worcester. Charles hid in the coppiced branches of an oak tree from where he could see Parliamentarian soldiers searching for him. When they had gone, he was able to sleep in the house and make use of a priest hole. Climbing the few steps to see the attic and the priest hole required some nimble footwork but a visit to the small tearoom and gift shop provided a well-earned break and retail therapy!



The Royal Oak, CC-BY-SA-4.0 Nilfanion

The fame of the Boscobel oak tree spread far and wide. When Charles was restored to the throne on 29th May 1660, the date became known as Oak Apple Day. And many pubs across England were named The Royal Oak. However, the Boscobel oak tree Charles hid in didn't do so well. Its fame meant that people came to take a branch or two, resulting eventually in a dead tree. Another oak grown from the original was struck by lightning, so the oak tree we all saw was a descendent of that. And heavily protected!

German Conversation, by Paula Yates

Learn, Laugh, Live – join a language group through Chester u3a

Chester u3a currently offers 10 different language groups covering 4 different languages (5 if you include Latin….. Discuss!). According to research learning a language or practicing your language skills has many benefits: apparently, it can boost your brain power and improve your cognitive function, delaying dementia. It can enhance your native language with a better understanding of grammar and it can deepen cultural understanding. All very desirable outcomes…..

However, my reason for joining u3a was very personal – and none of these. Both my daughters are living in German-speaking countries and I wanted to be able to travel there confidently and competently, I wanted to be able to converse with people in everyday life and I wanted to be able to follow current affairs – at least at a basic level. So armed with not much in the way of German, but considerable motivation, I applied to join the German conversation group.

I was extremely lucky to get a place quickly – there is now a waiting list and the turnover rate is pretty low, I can only guess that's because other people enjoy it as much as I do. How the sessions are structured has changed a bit over time (Covid affected us the same as everyone else) but include a mix of activities. What is clear is that all the group members have different reasons for coming and value different activities. For some, arguing over the correct grammar in a translation is the highlight of the week. For others it is hearing about the past and present travels in Germany of other members. For me, it's the opportunity to listen to and read German (and occasionally contribute orally).



German Flag - Public Domain

We are lucky in having a group leader who is incredibly organised and conscientious – there is always material prepared and provided for the sessions. I would say that the group meets all the u3a objectives – Learn, Laugh, Live. I have learnt a huge amount, from reading German articles, struggling with the (very) complicated German grammar, I can converse with my grandsons and arrive independently on my daughter's doorsteps. I have laughed lots, at my own mistakes and other people's humour. The sessions are always fun – the interests and personalities (quirks and idiosyncrasies?) of each member are reflected in the conversation – who would have known you could bond over a wimple!! And live…. yes, the social side is important to me connecting with other people on a regular basis and getting to know them, as is an insight into how other members view Germany and life in Germany.

Not having learnt English grammar at school has been a massive disadvantage for me and I now really wish I had. The group has been endlessly supportive of me – selectively correcting the worst of my errors in a gentle, friendly manner. My understanding has increased massively; my reading has improved though my pronunciation is still wobbly and speaking? Well, I am still the weakest link, but that's ok by me because of the support I get from my fellow group members. Oh – and the cakes and cookies are always good too!

Answers to Chester u3a Quiz

1 Turtle Bay
2 Cow Lane
3 Jaunty Goat
4 Kuckoo
5 Bear and Billet
6 Bonobo
7 Elephant Gift Shop
8 The Falcon
9 Two labradors – Chester Market
10 4 Monkeys

Racketball, by Adam Gerwagis

If you happen to wander near the sports facilities at Chester University on any given week, you're bound to hear two things: the unmistakable **thwack** of a racketball bouncing off the court walls, and the lively sound of laughter, friendly banter, and good-natured ribbing coming from the court side.

Our u3a Racketball Group has become a highlight of the week for a wonderfully diverse mix of players. Whether you're a seasoned court veteran with a mean serve or a complete newcomer picking up a racket for the first time, there is a place on the court for everyone.

A Game for All Styles and Abilities

What makes racketball so special - and why it's hit such a sweet spot for our group - is how accessible and adaptable it is. With a larger racket and a bouncier ball than squash, it offers a fantastic, low-impact cardio workout that's kind to the joints while keeping you on your toes!

Our sessions bring together a lively blend of personalities and play styles:

- **The Competitive Contenders:** Those who take their rallies seriously, tracking every point with a sharp eye and precise drop shots.
- **The Social Strategists:** Those who enjoy a good hit-about, focusing as much on the conversation between points as the game itself.
- **The Banter Brigade:** The court-side spectators and players who are always ready with a witty remark, a gentle tease about a missed shot, or a cheer for a great rally.

Beyond the Court

As much as we enjoy the physical thrill of a good match, the camaraderie extends well beyond the university courts. A great game of racketball is often best capped off by gathering around a long table to enjoy a coffee, a meal, share a glass of wine, trade stories, and laugh over the highlights (and hilarious misfires) of the day's play. It's these moments off the court that turn a sports group into a genuine community.

Interested in Joining Us?

We are always eager to welcome new faces - no prior racketball experience necessary! If you're looking to stay active, sharpen your reflexes, and enjoy some fantastic company with a guaranteed dose of laughter, come join us at Chester University.

- **When:** Tuesday and Thursday at 10:00 and Sunday at 11:00
- **Where:** Chester University Sports Facilities
- **What to bring:** Clean non-marking indoor trainers, comfy sportswear, and a good sense of humour! (Rackets can be provided if needed).

You're guaranteed a warm welcome. Contact "Racketball" via the Groups list on the Chester u3a website. Or just ask the committee at any u3a Monthly meeting to find out more.



An evening meal at Chez Joules, celebrating the 400th session of the Chester U3A Racketball Group

Train travellers – trips and tips, by Michael Ross

This proposed group will be for anyone interested in making trips by train - both in the UK and abroad. It will cover more than the Interrail meeting we had last February. Its potential membership is therefore wider than Interrailers and potential Interrailers. That's because we imagine there will be people who would like to learn more about travelling by train in the UK - or who prefer to fly or drive or sail to get abroad and then use the trains at their destination. And there will be some of you who plan to travel further than Europe.

We will aim to exchange experiences and share advice about good ideas for trips and how to make them. If there is interest, then we might also arrange day trips by train in the same way that Bus Buddies arrange day trips by bus.

The first meeting is at St Mary's Centre, Handbridge from 10:00 to 12:00 on Thursday 12 November. There will be a coffee/tea break in the middle. Parking at St Mary's is limited so if you can arrive by bus, bike or on foot then please do so. There will be a collection to cover the cost of room hire and refreshment.

At the meeting we shall see if there is enough support for formalising the group and invite offers to contribute to meetings or help with the organisation. Offers for short talks (up to twenty minutes) on 12 November are welcome.

If you have any questions or suggestions, or are interested but unable to attend on 12 November, then please let me know at interrail@chesteru3a.org.uk



View from a Train Window

Chester u3a. Annual General Meeting

Each year Chester u3a is required to hold an **A**nnual **G**eneral **M**eeting (AGM), the main purpose of which is to elect a committee for the coming year.

The AGM will be held on the 19-11-26 at the start of the normal Thursday Monthly Meeting. It should take no longer than 10-15 minutes. The proposed committee for 2026/2027 is given in the table below. Further details may be found on our website:

AGM 2026 - Chester

Post	Nominee	Proposer	Seconder
Chair	Sue Houghton	Carol McAlea	Jackie Coombe
Vice Chair	Peter Goodhew	Jonathan Banks	Christine Robinson
Treasurer	Tony Hurst	Trish Langford	Tim Carley
Business Secretary	Jeff Howard	Kath Smith	Pauline de Hass
Social Secretary	Ruth Shaw	Jeff Howard	Sue Houghton
Speaker Secretary	Sally Clarke	Jean Creswell	Lalini Cook
Membership Secretary	Liz Eccleston	Catherine Potts	Ann Steels
Groups Coordinator 1	Dianna Ellson	Ann Ireland	Cilla Mann
Groups Coordinator 2	Steve Moore	Linda Gibson	Michael Wilkinson
Committee Member	Ann Ireland	Mary McMahon	Gwen Goodhew
Committee Member	Dave Houghton	Fran Reading	Jeff Howard
Committee Member	Vacancy	n/a	n/a

All members are invited to attend.

Jeff Howard (Business Secretary)

The cut-off date for the next Chester Times is Friday 20th November 2026.
Please send contributions to: chestertimes@chesteru3a.org.uk or: PO Box 167 Chester CH1 9FB.
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