

# u3a learn, laugh, live Benfleet Newsletter



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## Chairman's Foreword

New year, new beginnings, new newsletter. This time of year we draw up plans, make promises and then try to fulfil them. Welcome to 2026. Our branch is in a strong position but as a lot of groups are full, we still need people maybe to start new groups.

Our newsletter is now edited and managed by Jane and Mike Murphy and I hope you all enjoy the new layout. Please continue to send articles in so that they can be published. We greatly appreciate the work Alan Aldridge put into the Bulletin during his eight years at the helm. Spread the word about what your group has done and future events.

Please stay safe and healthy.

*Fred Simpkins*

## From the editor

Greetings and welcome to issue 57. A sincere thank you to everyone who has contributed this time round with group news, other entertaining pieces or fabulous images. Everything produced is valued and appreciated and if there is something you have sent to me that has not been included, it will already be earmarked for issue 58.

We hope you like the new folded A3 format of the printed version designed to enhance the newsletter. Fred and the committee all voted for this upgrade. Happy reading!

*Jane.*

**Next Issue, June 2026**

Website: [benfleet.u3asite.uk](http://benfleet.u3asite.uk)

Chairman: Fred Simpkins



Facebook: [com/groups/benfleetu3a](https://www.facebook.com/groups/benfleetu3a)

Newsletter Editor: Jane Murphy

## Focus on Denise & Ian Phipps, our outgoing and fabulous outings coordinators.

Originally outings for Benfleet u3a were organised by Maria Kelly, a very difficult act to follow, and when Covid restrictions were relaxed Denise & Ian were suddenly and unceremoniously in at the deep end.

All suitable locations were carefully researched to provide varied experiences & reflect varying member mobilities. Seating plans, were finessed to a fine art.

Ian had responsibility for lists, tickets, food & dietary requirements & collecting essential mobile numbers. His experience in supply chain management transporting goods globally, correlated with the logistics needed to transport people from A to B.

Before every trip members were issued with tickets, trip details, pick up points & seat numbers. Nothing was left to chance.

Once Denise & Ian were on the coach, they had responsibility for the passengers but before they got on and after they got off, the driver had this role & had a list of passengers who would be in his care.

In the 3.5 years as joint outings coordinators, Denise & Ian ran an astonishing 20 trips to a wide range of locations. The work that they put into these fabulous events cannot be over emphasised.

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to them for their commitment & dedication and it needs to be noted that they attended ALL of these events and payed for their own tickets so it was an even bigger commitment than some of us realised.

Thank you, Denise & Ian, you did a fabulous job. We are so grateful. Let's hope somebody else will pick up the baton and that outings in whatever form, will resume in the not too distant future.



## Our exciting programme of Speaker Talks for 2026

All talks on a Tuesday at Richmond Hall, organised by Shirley Wolfe

**28th April** - Neil Hanson – "Inn & Out at the Top",

**26th May** - Andrew Baker – Political Correctness

**24th June** - Mike Worby – Entertaining You

**28th July** - Graham Mee – South East Essex RSPB Local Group

**25th August** - Graham Humphrey, Volunteering for the National Coastwatch Institution

**29th September** - AGM – No Speaker

**27th October** - Tony Harris – As Donald Trump

**24th November** - Richard Graham – The Return of the Magician

NO MEETING In DECEMBER

## Photography: IOTY 2025 - The Results

Firstly, thank you to the 18 Photography Group Members who entered the competition – a record entry.

Our aim has been for each individual member to produce their 'Personal Best' and achieve continual improvement year on year. The range and quality this year has been outstanding which makes it truly difficult to select the top 3.

The Photography group held its own judging and voting in December and it was opened up to all of our u3a members in late December, closing on Friday 9 January 2026.

57 Members voted in the All Member vote. We thank you all and hope that you also enjoyed reviewing the photos.

The results ,separated into Photography Group and All Member votes, are as follows:



Lee King



Mike Murphy

### Places

Winner

2<sup>nd</sup> Place

3<sup>rd</sup> Place

### Photography Group Vote

Lee King

Joint: Mavis Regan, Mike Murphy

Joint: Ken Slaney, Alan Aldridge

### All Members Vote

Mike Murphy

Marion Coleman

Mavis Regan



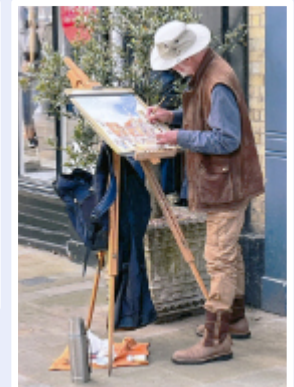
Mavis Regan



Marion Coleman



Alan Aldridge



Ken Slaney

Congratulations to the overall winners and thank you all again, *Alan*

## Calling all photographers!

Why not send in a Benfleet-themed photograph that could become next month's front cover photo banner?

If you fancy being front page news send us an image that is suitable to fit in a panoramic or letterbox type format!  
We look forward to hearing from you!



## Spotlight on our interest group coordinator: Suzanne Worland.

Suzanne is a wonderful u3a ambassador & gives a warm welcome to all. The point of contact for all the special interest groups, she holds all the necessary information in a folder: where, what and how many people may join. All groups must register names addresses & emergency contact details in line with regulations. When groups are full, Suzanne requests that waiting lists are set up.

She is always available at Hall meetings so people can ask questions about the groups & she is contactable by email & by telephone. She sets up group boards for members to suggest new groups and request to join existing ones.

She provides puzzles, books & plants, for members to take free of charge & encourages folk to contribute items for future meetings. Importantly she sends out cards to people who are unwell and sympathy cards when people have lost loved ones.

As a thank you to Group contacts she organises an annual afternoon tea which in 2025 was held at Benfleet Yacht Club. And finally, she organises an annual dance for members of Benfleet u3a.

Thank you, Suzanne, your tireless efforts are so much appreciated.



## Benfleet U3A Singing Group

This long-standing group (14 years and counting!) has always had a keen and committed following. We meet twice a month on a Thursday for two hours of friendship, chat and, of course, singing! We sing purely for enjoyment and entertainment and we have built up an extensive folder of lyrics from which twenty different ones are chosen each session for our sing-a-long.



Here is a small example:

*Amarillo, Build Me Up Buttercup, Come Fly With Me, Dancing Queen, Hey Big Spender, It's Now Or Never, Jolene, Maggie May, Poetry In Motion, Sway, The Wanderer, Uptown Girl, Kissing in The Back Row Of The Movies, You Can't Hurry Love .... to name but a few!*

We have also arranged a few trips to see live music performed at the Cliffs Pavillion, Runnymede Hall and, more locally, at Benfleet Methodist Church to hear the BOS sing "Songs From The Musicals".

We all find that singing really lifts the spirits and everyone always leaves smiling and looking forward to the next session! *Sue Day*

### - From the committee -

Discussion took place about a standard charge of 25p for people attending meetings in the houses of other members to cover refreshments. The committee decided they would prefer people to pay whatever they wish when they attend group meetings.



## Christmas Jumpers - Benfleet u3a style!

The final meeting of 2025 took place at the end of November. Our excellent committee layed on mince pies and an opportunity for the people on each table to win an attractive table centre by matching a raffle ticket number to the number underneath the item.

Everyone pushed the boat out with Christmas jumpers and looked fabulous!  
A good time was had by all!



## Quiz - Gone to the dogs

Answers on page 10

- 1) What is the name of Dorothy's dog in the Wizard of Oz?
- 2) What was the name of the dog who guarded his deceased owner's grave in Edinburgh for 14 years?
- 3) What literally propelled Leica to fame?
- 4) Which Dickens character had a spaniel named Jip ( Gypsy)?
- 5) Which breed of dog is Beethoven in the film franchise?
- 6) Which breed of dog is owned by Velma, Fred, Daphne and Shaggy?
- 7) What is the dog called in Peter Pan?
- 8) Originally a 1940 novel by Eric Knight, followed by many film and TV series up to 2005. Which dog is this about?
- 9) Who owns Muttley in Wacky Races?
- 10) Which breed of dog is Bullseye in Oliver Twist?
- 11) Whose dogs were originally sired by Susan and included Sugar, Honey, Whisky, Sherry and Bee?
- 12) Which dog is teased by Garfield?
- 13) What was the name of the first dog on Blue Peter?
- 14) Which comic strip by Charles M Schultz features the dog Snoopy?
- 15) The painting of Jack Russell "nipper" was used as the logo for which company?
- 16) Which blue Hanna-Barbera dog sang an off key rendition of "oh my darling Clementine"?
- 17) Which stop-motion dog is made of plasticine, clay and never speaks?
- 18) What did pickles find in South London in March 1966?
- 19) Which breed of dog were: Pongo, Missis, Perdita and Prince?
- 20) What is the technical name for the dog star?

## Local and Essex history group.

Marion Coleman

The group was set up during lockdown and has run on an online basis with different challenges set each month.

We started by looking at Benfleet history researching aspects such as interesting street names, well-known people, old buildings et cetera. Then we moved further out into Essex, exploring a different theme each month. After this the Group challenge was to visit different Essex villages and write an account of these.



Since then, during the winter months, I set a number of different quizzes such as early Essex history, famous events and important people for the group to research. During the better weather I arrange three or four visits to places of interest in Essex. Last year we explored the Clifftown conservation area in Southend, we followed the Witham town Trail and finally discovered much interesting information about Billericay including the Cater Museum.

The current Quiz is about some of the fascinating churches in Essex. The results of the research will be published on our website in March.

Being quite a large group, we do not meet together on a regular day. Anyone can join to take part in the Quizzes and join us for our visits.

*Marion*

## u3a Matters



**u3a Matters** (previously named Third Age Matters) is the official national magazine of the u3a (University of the Third Age). It is published five times a year by the Third Age Trust.

U3a Matters is a publication that serves all u3a groups across the UK. Fred made the excellent suggestion that we should publicise our inter U3A photography win which was included in the previous issue of our newsletter. Showcasing this success to a much wider audience would of course be a fitting boost for Benfleet u3a.

When the article and photographs had been submitted, I received a generic acknowledgement and thank you with the rider that because of the large number of articles, letters and items that are sent in, it is not possible to contact individual u3a groups directly but I was assured that everything they receive is read.

Let's look at the possibility of sending further submissions and if anyone has any great ideas about what should be put forward please let us know!

*Jane*

## The Wildlife Group Janet Humphrey



**Lake Meadows.** There was an array of colours with trees dressed for autumn. A conservation area was covered in different types of nettles and it would be good, in summer, to discover which insects they attract.

The car park with toilets and an inexpensive café with a range of goodies is sadly no longer free.

There were Canada geese on the lake as well as Coots & moorhens.

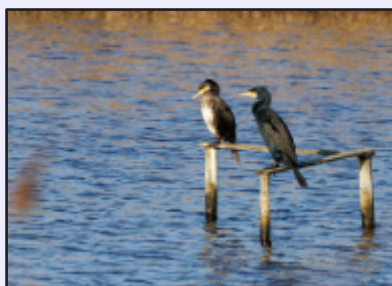
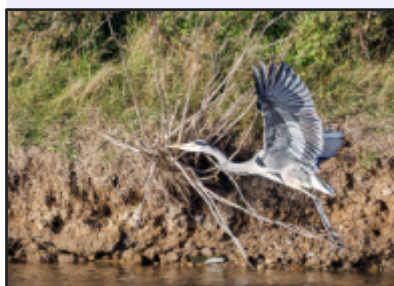
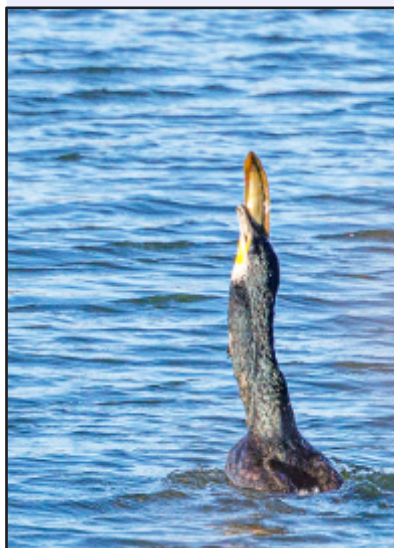
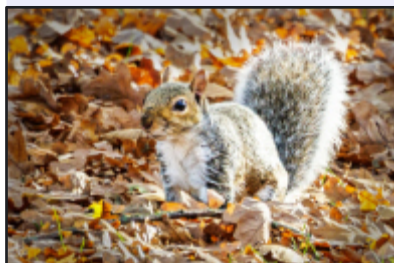
We saw everything from Yarrow to spear thistle, we saw giant Redwood, Lombardy Poplar etc. Fungi included ivory bonnet & hare's foot ink cap.

**Shoebury Garrison.** We had a lovely bright visit. We witnessed a Cormorant catch and swallow an eel after a lot of diving and getting a different hold. Not the loveliest of scenes but that is what the Wildlife Group is about.

We saw and heard a wide range of birds: godwit, little grebe, curlew etc & we saw ground Ivy, fennel & many other plants.

Lunch at the serendipity Café was lovely!

*Janet*



## Art Beginners. Sandra Bedwell

The Art Beginners have quickly progressed to intermediate level and are really doing well! We are now progressing to face and body with a long view to producing portraits.

Well done everybody!

*Sandra*



## Exploring the u3a logo.



Christine Tebbutt had the excellent idea of looking into the three words that make up our u3a logo: *Learn, Laugh, Live*.

She came up with some very interesting quotations for each and her suggestion is that we could develop this further in subsequent editions of the newsletter. Do send in other suggestions! Thank you, Christine!

**“Learn:”** “Never confuse education with intelligence, you can have a PhD and still be an idiot”  
(Richard Feynman American physicist.)

**“Laugh:”** “There is little success where there is little laughter.”  
(Andrew Carnegie American/Scottish philanthropist.)

**“Live:”** “If you can’t change the direction of the wind, adjust your sails”  
(H Jackson Brown American author.)

## Macs and Wellies Group

In November, the Macs and Wellies Group went to Hyde Hall to see the glow display. Hyde Hall is such a beautiful garden and to see it illuminated on a dark winter evening must have been truly magical.



A kaleidoscope of gorgeous colour, patterns and illuminated trees and shrubs provided a feast for the eyes and food for the soul.

Thank you so much to Michael and Sheila for sharing with us these wonderful images!

## Stories, anecdotes and sayings

Jan Lane has had the wonderful idea of requesting stories, anecdotes and sayings from family members old and young, from the past and from the present. Brilliant! Thank you, Jan. Do please get in touch with your own ideas so that we can celebrate all the important details that make each family and all its members special.

She kicks off with: *“My cousin in Maltby, Yorkshire, didn’t have a hot flush but she had a “dab”.*

Jan’s Gran, born in 1888, toothless but able to eat pork crackling very well with her gums, would say, *“Pardon, Mrs Arden, there’s a cat in your garden”* when she burped. Jan’s investigation has discovered that this is not her Gran’s invention but seems to be from a music hall act coupled with various responses including, *“Yes there is and all alone, chewing on a mutton bone.”*

## Cornwall: interesting facts.

(Thanks to Sue Quattrucci.)

Did you know there are two towns called Saint Ives in Cornwall?

One is the popular tourist attraction and the other Saint Ives is near Liskeard. This is where the house & museum is situated for Emily Hobhouse (April 1860 ~ June 1926), a British welfare campaigner, anti-war activist and pacifist primarily remembered for working to change the deprived conditions inside the British concentration camps in South Africa built to incarcerate Boer and African civilians during the second Boer war.

The highly recommended museum is well worth a visit and you can discover for yourself what an amazing person Emily was.

*Sue*



## Book Club Pat Cluness

**Book review:** Moon Tiger by Penelope Lively.

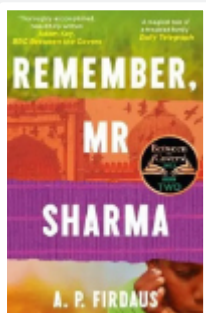
This novel spans the time before, during and after World War II. It won the 1987 Booker prize. It begins with a woman ( Claudia) on her deathbed saying that she is going to write a history of the world.

It develops into a story of love, incest and a desire to be recognised properly as a woman. Claudia becomes a correspondent during the war in Cairo. A man with whom she is involved is killed but she then meets others and has a daughter who is raised by grandparents.

We felt that sometimes the book was difficult to read/follow, but the group enjoyed it in the main, perhaps wondering why it had merited a Booker prize!



**Book review:** " Remember me, Mr Sharmer" by AP Firdaus.



This novel is about a 12 year old boy in 1997 Delhi, whose mother goes missing. This leads him to a talking vulture who who guides him through his family's past including the trauma of partition to uncover dark secrets and understand present day family tension.

The novel delves into intergenerational trauma, social hypocrisy and the stories people tell themselves to find freedom this is all done through a child's perception. Unfortunately, no one in the group enjoyed the book and some did not even finish reading it.

*Pat Cluness.*

## Lunch Club: Christmas meal at The Castle, Hadleigh

The final lunch club of 2025 was held at the Castle in Hadleigh and the cheerful photographs show that once again a good time was had by all. Suzanne works tirelessly to make sure that a suitable venue is booked each month and she offers a set number of places on a first come first served basis. everyone in the group is very grateful to her for her hard work on our behalf. We look forward to many more lunches in 2026.



## The New Discussion Group. Jane Murphy

The new Group, whose tongue-in-cheek name is: "Knights and afternoons of the round table" meets once a month and will have met four times when you read this. We discuss two items per session, agreeing which these will be between us. Tolerance and respect are at the heart of our meetings as we approach topics from different perspectives, different political persuasions and different backgrounds.

We have considered whether vaccination should be mandatory, whether voting should be obligatory in elections and what do we consider to be toxic in society. We have also mulled over the question of whether there is a place for grammar school education and it was fascinating to hear about how the education system works in the Netherlands.

Although we take on serious topics, there is plenty of room for laughter and a lighthearted approach as well. The group is deliberately small, but we would be happy to take on a couple of extra folk if anybody else wishes to join us.

### Answers to Gone to the Dogs quiz:

- |   |                                  |  |
|---|----------------------------------|--|
| 1) Toto                                   | 8) Rough collie, Lassie.         | 14) Peanuts                            |
| 2) Greyfriars Bobby.                      | 9) Dick Dastardly                | 15) HMV His Master's Voice.            |
| 3) Sputnik two, launched in November 1957 | 10) Bull Terrier                 | 16) Huckleberry Hound                  |
| 4) Dora Spenlow /Copperfield.             | 11) Queen Elizabeth II's Corgies | 17) Gromit                             |
| 5) Saint Bernard                          | 12) Odie                         | 18) The Jules Rimmer trophy-World Cup. |
| 6) Great Dane, Scooby Doo                 | 13) Petra                        | 19) Dalmatians                         |
| 7) Nana                                   |                                  | 20) Sirius.                            |

## The Walking Group

### December 2025



The forecast for our walk on the 18th of December had been very wet and windy all day but despite that 20 members met at Benfleet station to catch a train to Leigh on Sea .

We started the walk past the cockle sheds on our way to Tomassi's restaurant in Southend, following the coastal path. From the time we started, the rain was becoming heavier and when we arrived in Leigh old town, the wind was picking up. By the time we arrived at the Gypsy Bridge on the cinder path, the majority of the group wisely decided to catch the next train from Chalkwell to Southend but there was no opportunity to take the normal group photograph.

This was the final walk of 2025 but in the 14 years since Doreen started the group, we have been remarkably lucky with the weather and this occasion was one of the few wet ones.

### January 2026

Just a few photos of our first walk of the year. We met in Jotmans Lane at 10.30 on Thursday 22 January. The forecast all week had been for rain on the day but although it was cloudy it was promising to be fairly dry at the time we were walking. 16 people turned up with a further 2 who would meet us at our destination, the Oysterfleet Hotel on Canvey, for lunch.

We walked down Appleton Road to Richmond Park , then on to Canvey Bridge to pick up the Winter Gardens Path adjacent to the Golf Course. From there we crossed Somnes Avenue to Station Approach coming out onto Link Road and on to Canvey Lakes path to the hotel.

The distance was 3.5 miles and the only small stretch of slightly sticky path was the beginning of Winter Gardens and we arrived at the Oysterfleet at our due time of 12.00 in dry weather.

The only rain started as I walked up my driveway with the door key in my hand and now 2 hours later it is pouring.

*Doreen and Peter Wiggans*



## Benfleet u3a Committee Members March 2026

<b>Chairman:</b>	Fred Simpkins
<b>Vice-Chair:</b>	Maria Pearman
<b>Treasurer:</b>	Rina Munro
<b>Business Secretary:</b>	Christine Tebbutt
<b>Membership Secretary:</b>	Bob Munson
<b>Interest Groups Coordinator:</b>	Suzanne Worland
<b>Welcome Buddy:</b>	Denise Phipps
<b>Welcome Buddy:</b>	Ian Phipps
<b>Committee Member:</b>	Sue Quattrucci :
<b>Committee Member:</b>	Sheila Radford

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<b>Speaker Organiser:</b>	Shirley Wolfe
<b>Outings Organiser:</b>	<b>VACANCY.</b> A volunteer is needed!
<b>Website Manager:</b>	ECOM UK Limited
<b>Newsletter Editor</b>	Jane Murphy
<b>Newsletter Creator</b>	Mike Murphy

### **Bereavement and illness:**

Please contact Suzanne Worland if you have details of any bereavement or illness within the u3a community. She will make sure that an appropriate card is sent out.