



# HAVERHILL & DISTRICT

**u3a** learn,  
laugh,  
live

**News and Views**

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TOWN COUNCIL

**May 2026**

## **From the Chair**

As I write this, the diary is doing that familiar u3a trick of looking pleasantly empty one moment... and then, when you glance back, it's somehow packed with good things. If you've been out and about to meetings, groups, talks and the all-important cups of tea, you'll know exactly what I mean.

A real highlight recently was the REACH charity concert on 30<sup>th</sup> April, which raised over £3,000. Thank you to everyone who supported it - whether you sang, clapped, helped behind the scenes or simply turned up and enjoyed the music. It was one of those evenings that reminded us how much can be achieved when a community pulls together.

Regarding making support go further, a gentle reminder about Gift Aid. If you're a UK taxpayer and you've signed a Gift Aid declaration, our u3a can usually claim an extra 25p from HMRC for every £1 you donate — at no extra cost to you. In other words: the same membership fee or donation, but with a little bonus boost that really adds up. Last year's claim was £717.54, a very useful sum.

If you haven't opted in yet, please consider doing so - it's one of the simplest ways to help us cover the everyday costs that keep everything running smoothly. And if you're not sure whether you're already signed up, just ask at the next meeting (or contact our Membership/Treasurer team) and we'll

point you in the right direction. The only catch is that you need to have paid enough Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax in the tax year to cover the amount we reclaim.

All the Policies have now been updated by Sue Dickinson and agreed by the Committee (thank you Sue). These can be viewed along with the updated Constitution on the current website under Documents ([www.haverhillu3a.com](http://www.haverhillu3a.com)).

Finally, a warm welcome to new members, and a big thank you to everyone who makes our groups and events happen - especially those who quietly arrive early to set out chairs (and are mysteriously still there at the end, stacking them again). Here's to more shared learning, laughter and the occasional perfectly timed biscuit.

With best wishes

**Tom Parker – Chair**

## **Speaker's Corner**

It was unfortunate that our booked speaker was unable to attend the April meeting, but we were delighted that **Duncan Bickley**, a retired commercial helicopter pilot, was able to step in at short notice.

With more than 20 years in the cockpit and over 7,500 hours in the air, Duncan brought a wealth of experience to his talk. He began by describing the challenges of flying through restricted airspace, including the complexities of navigating around Heathrow. Drawing on his years running his own helicopter company at Cambridge Airport, he shared stories of flying clients to

all manner of destinations - from exclusive hotels in Berkshire to riverside restaurants along the Thames. A video of a flight up the Thames, passing the O2, the Tower of London and HMS Belfast, gave members a vivid sense of the twists and turns of helicopter travel at around 700 feet, with many familiar landmarks prompting smiles of recognition. Another video transported us to Paris in the snow, including a spectacular flight over the Palace of Versailles.

Training new pilots formed another part of Duncan's business, and at this point he produced an unexpected set of "props": a brush and dustpan. To the amusement of the audience, he used them to demonstrate the dexterity and coordination required to control a helicopter, with each item representing a different control input. He then revealed two pieces of dowel standing in for rotor blades, showing how they respond to the slightest adjustment. Training flights in the mountainous skiing regions of France provided some breathtaking video footage, illustrating the skill needed to operate safely in such demanding terrain.

Duncan also spoke about some of the well-known passengers he has flown, including Katherine Jenkins and Ray Winstone, sharing a particularly entertaining story about transporting Winstone to a West Ham cup match in Wales.

He concluded with a very different but equally compelling topic: his involvement in **Pledge a Pint**, an initiative raising awareness of the urgent need for more blood donors. Duncan, a platelet donor himself, and a fellow donor flew the entire coastline of the UK in one of his helicopters to promote the cause.

It was an eclectic and thoroughly engaging talk, delivered with humour, candour and an infectious enthusiasm for a life lived in many chapters. Members left with a real sense of having shared in some remarkable experiences.

Our next Speaker Meeting is on Tuesday

26<sup>th</sup> May at the Arts Centre (doors open at 10.00, with the talk starting at 10.30, and free hot beverages available in the bar!). Our speaker will be Bryan Thurlow on the ghostly and ghoulish goings on at Borley Rectory.

**Margaret Ross, Speaker Secretary**

### **Walking, Talking and Munching**

Just 10 members of the WTM group met at the Red Lion, Great Wrating for the April walk. Led by Ken and Pat Hainsby, the route took in Little Wrating church, where a footpath led to another, which headed toward the iconic Water Tower in the distance.

The day being bright and breezy, a wonderful view of unspoilt countryside was had as the path continued to ascend to the Tower. Once reached, the group posed for a photo, before descending the concrete driveway toward the Withersfield/Wrating lane.



Skylarks could be heard way above the walkers and over the yellow fields of rape seed.

Rejoining the Newmarket Road, a short cut was taken through the graveyard of St Mary, Gt Wrating, before crossing over to the entrance walls of a farm, built by Italian POWs. After Italy's surrender, prisoners were sent around the country to assist with farm work. One Italian worker on the farm in Wrating was such a good worker he was encouraged to come back after the war and bring his family, which he did. His son, Carmello, tells of being 7 years old when the family arrived, and they were initially put up at the Rose and Crown, Haverhill. The site of a full English breakfast the next morning was both amazing and unbelievable. He, Cam, went on to say,

coming from Italy and not speaking the language was a trial and test of his resolve when he attended the local school. He did well however, learnt the language and passed his school exams. He worked for many years at Cleales in Haverhill.

After the history lesson, the group returned to the Red Lion where good lunches were provided.

**Ken Hainsby**

### **Country Casuals - Friday 21<sup>st</sup> April**

On a lovely sunny morning ten members of the group visited Coggeshall for an interesting three-and-a-half-mile walk. Starting in the central car park, we set off through the village admiring many of the old, listed buildings that line the village streets. Before long we reached open countryside and passed several paddocks in which horses gently grazed. Following the River Blackwater, we joined the Essex Way and headed west. To our left was an ancient water mill that was adapted to produce silk cloth for over thirty years. To our right were buildings surviving from 1154, being part of the original Coggeshall Abbey founded by the Cistercian order but now a private residence. The path took us back towards the village, but we carried on following the Essex Way past the large Grange Barn which is part of National Trust.

Now the pathway proceeded through gently rolling farmland with a young forest plantation to the right. After a mile, we turned right to an earthen path used by horse riders which could be muddy in poor weather. This led us to Nunn's Bridge, built



in 1892 by Dick Nunn, the local smithy, after the original wooden bridge rotted and was washed away in 1875. As the council did nothing to build a new one, Dick

used his skills and built one from wrought iron in his forge. It was transported whole on two carts and positioned across the river where it still stands today. You can see from the photo that it has cross rails at each end for strength, but it made for a hilarious few minutes with ten elderly u3a members trying to climb over them each nursing various mobility problems. However, we all survived and returned along the riverbank to our lunch stop at The White Hart in the village.

All members enjoyed the walk as it had such a variety of points of interest, from farmland to forest to riverside to ancient buildings.



To finish, it should be said that The White Hart is the most haunted building in Essex,

but our lunch passed peacefully.

**Peter Tatam**

### **London Originals**

#### **Discovering Lavenham – A Step Back in Time**

On 21st April, London Originals enjoyed a wonderful day out discovering the historic village of Lavenham. Blessed with lovely spring weather, members explored one of England's best-preserved medieval villages, famous for its crooked timber-framed buildings and rich wool-trading history.



Our guide, Kate from Guide East, was excellent in bringing the history of the

village to life with her engaging and informative commentary.

Lavenham became one of the wealthiest towns in England during the 15th Century through the wool trade and the famous "Blue Broadcloth". Many of its beautiful buildings were built by prosperous cloth merchants.

A highlight of the visit was Little Hall, a fascinating medieval house dating back over 600 years. Its historic rooms, oak beams and collections provided a glimpse into life in Tudor England.



Medieval sources suggest it was owned by the Causton family and various traders, scholars and school masters. It was later subdivided and housed 20 inhabitants.

It was rescued from decline in 1924, by the Gayer-Anderson twins, who lovingly restored the property and filled it with historic collections gathered during their travels. It opened to the public in 1975.

The famous Harry Potter house, used in the film, was also seen during our tour and indeed it is a lovely building.

The day was enjoyed by all, with plenty of time for coffee, lunch and the opportunity to see the charming streets, shops and tea rooms before returning home with many happy memories.

**Helga Mohr**

### **History Group Ely Trip - Friday May 1<sup>st</sup>**

On Friday 1<sup>st</sup> May, a glorious sunny day, ten members of the history group visited the town of Ely, and particularly the two museums.

We used shared cars and arrived at 10.15, with a loo stop and a coffee break as our first priorities. After coffee we visited Ely Town Museum which is housed in the old gaol with exhibits of the cells, restraints and punishments that previous generations endured.



Names carved into the stone walls were poignant and thought provoking. The story of the Fens and development of the town over the centuries were well presented with several video screens showing appropriate footage.

After this we lunched at The Lamb, close to the museum, taking advantage of the special menu of two mains and two drinks for £32, which we all found to be excellent value. Then, well-fortified, we visited the Cromwell House Museum where our joint museum ticket gave us a tour aided by audio information for each room.



It ended with a question! Was Oliver Cromwell a Saint or a Sinner? He believed strongly that Britain should follow a simpler Christian faith of Puritanism and be ruled by parliament, but was a civil war and beheading the King the correct way to accomplish his aims?

We just had time for a welcome ice-cream and then back home. A long, but very interesting day.

**Peter Tatam**

## City Walkers

The 29<sup>th</sup> April started as a dull, windy day with a real threat of rain in the air. Undeterred the City Walkers gathered in the village of Lavenham, some availing themselves of a warming coffee in one of the quaint refreshment establishments before gathering to meet our guide. Malcolm is a National Trust Guide who sat us by the WWII memorial in the market square. The sun began to shine, and he gave us an overview of the history of Lavenham.

Up until the 13<sup>th</sup> Century there is no documentary history although it is clear the population was engaged in the wool trade. In 1257 Henry III granted a Market Charter which was the catalyst for expansion of trading abilities. The Town became prosperous from weaving and dyeing activity, importing cloth from the continent, processing and reselling. A speciality being the use of Woad to dye cloth to what became a fashionable pale blue colour. The Lavender Blue Tea Rooms, where some started our day, hints to the town's history.

The Town enjoyed great wealth for about 400 years, apparently achieving the lofty position of 14<sup>th</sup> richest town in the country, contributing high levels of tax revenue to the Crown. With wealth and influx of traders came development of fine buildings. Sadly, during the reign of Henry VIII things went downhill. Heavy taxation, loss of export markets due to political activity, influx of European refugees with innovative skills and changing fashions ruined the town's source of income.

Before our walk Malcolm touched on the wartime impact on the village, as commemorated where we had been seated. Local men served in The Great War and sadly 76 did not return. Lavenham hosted and supported 487<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group of the United States Army Air Force. Over 4,800 airmen are known to have served with the squadron, of whom 233 lost their lives. Memorial records are held in the Guildhall and the Town Hall.

Our walk around the village displayed the architecture of the days when Lavenham was at its peak. Timber-framed houses, many Open Hall style, displaying the opulence of those successful trading days. Entry doors of "cat and kitten" style, (*a small door for personal access inside a larger goods door*) still exist, and large windows letting light into weaving rooms point to the history of the local trade. Family crests are also still visible. We saw where Jane Taylor (1783–1824) lived, the author of *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*. Old buildings in places like Lavenham also attract film location seekers and we were shown a building in Water Street used in a Harry Potter film.

We finished our guided tour at the Church of St Peter and St Paul. A fine Church with a 141ft tower, built with sponsorship of cloth traders on a site of a church since Anglo Saxon times.



Our day ended with a meal together in the Cock Horse.

We are grateful for the help of the Lavenham Tourist Hub and our very knowledgeable guide Malcolm.

***Iris and David Cook***

## Nature Group

In April, the sun shone for us again as 18 members of the Nature Group met at Therfield Heath, Royston, in search of Pasque flowers. The Heath is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and covers some 420 acres of ancient common land with a long burrow, thought to be Neolithic, and several Bronze Age round barrows, all of which English Heritage classes as scheduled ancient monuments.

Most of us met at the café car park and took the hike over to another car park that afforded a shorter walk, (3 miles or 1.5 miles round trip) where we met other

members, along with our very knowledgeable guide Ellie. On the walk from the café, we had a good view of Wimpole Hall, via binoculars, in the distance.

We passed through Hertfordshire Wildlife Trust woodland where we could see the tips of helleborine orchids poking through.

As we reached an area called Chalk Hill, we admired the stunning views. As its name suggests, the ground is chalky and provides ideal conditions for the Pasque flower. Most of the flowers had just gone over but many were still in bloom to be admired. Ellie explained that the groundsmen on the golf course maintain a lot of the heath and to keep the soil of poor quality in this area, which suits the Pasque flowers, the mowed grass has to be raked up and taken away, an arduous task, I'm sure. Once again, we recorded our birds, around 15 species were seen and/or heard.



Those of us who wanted lunch met up at the café where we rounded off our day with a very enjoyable meal.

I've driven past here on the A505 so many times, never realising there was such a vast, and beautiful area alongside it. I shall try and get back to see the helleborine orchids.

**Jan Marrone**

### **Sunday Strollers**

Ten members of the group set off from Radwinter Village Hall car park on a cloudy and breezy day for our May walk, led by David and Jean. We crossed some extremely dry and hard field footpaths, passing through Maple End and then through further fields to All Saints Church, Wimbish. After a short stop we continued beside fields of sheep upon some surprisingly lush green grassy paths. We saw red kites, noisy rooks and hares. The final part was through St Mary's Churchyard Radwinter, with the unusual

church porch, whose former half is 14<sup>th</sup> Century but with a half-timbered upper part which was added in the 1880s in the old style, and finally back to the car park.

The walk on 14<sup>th</sup> June will be at Steeple Bumpstead. Parking is behind the Village Hall. From the centre of the village, go past the Fox and Hounds pub on your right and follow the road round onto Finchingfield Road. Pass the Village Hall, also on your right and take the next right onto Bower Hall Drive. The road bears round to the right and then at the next left hand bend, there is a small car park on the right at the back of the Village Hall, with space for maybe 8 cars and hopefully plenty of space to park on the road (depends what else is on, football etc), obviously being mindful of residents' driveways. Please be ready to walk at 10.30.

My thanks to Jean and David for leading the May walk.

**Barbara Lavender**

### **Next Meetings:**

**Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> May 2026**

**Bryan Thurlow** on the ghostly and ghoulish goings on at **Borley Rectory** .

**Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2026**

**One Place, One Time, One Life**

This talk by the National Trust takes a look at some of the history of the buildings at Anglesey Abbey, between the years 1236 and 1956.

Deadline for the Rolling Screen:

**Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2026**

email using landscape format to:  
chair@haverhillu3a.com

Deadline for next edition:

**Friday 19<sup>th</sup> June 2026**

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