



# **BASILDON AND BILLERICAY**

**u3a**

**NEWSLETTER No 388**

**MARCH 2026**



Spring arrives at last

## **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

The end of our u3a year is fast approaching and there are Committee roles to fill.

As most of you are aware, to function as a u3a we need the ongoing help and support of members. Membership of the Committee is not a role for someone else; there are varied roles for all members to consider.

No one is just left to get on with it, all committee members work as a team. If you don't agree with the views of others, well we need you also, as intelligent debate is healthy!

### **VACANT POSTS AS OF JUNE 2026**

Some of our current Committee Members can, and are, standing for re-election, but some have served the maximum allowed of five years and are unable to stand again.

**The following posts will become vacant in June this year.**

#### **Publicity**

An interesting role for any member. No specific skills required, just an interest in supporting an enthusiastic team of our members and promoting our u3a (there is always help and support available)

**Vice Chairman** Observation and supportive role.

#### **Website and Beacon Administrator**

This post does require some IT knowledge, but if you have the basic knowledge, you will be able to do this role with support from the committee and Beacon. (there is always help and support available)

#### **Welcome and Accessibility**

An interesting role for any member who has an interest in meeting people, The main skill needed for this role is to be able to talk to people.

This post could also be filled by more than one member (there is always help and support available)

Interested in any of the above roles? Have a chat without being committed.

We look forward to hearing from you (via website email)

S.R., Chairman

# MONTHLY MEETING

March 27<sup>th</sup> 2026

Friday, March 27th 2026

2.30pm in the Canon Roche Centre, Laindon Road Billericay.

**Speaker**      **Howard Slater**      **“ The East End of London “**



Travel through the diverse cultural tapestry of London’s East End, from the Huguenots to modern-day Bengalis.

**Next Month**

**April 24<sup>th</sup> 2026**

**Speaker**

**Martyn Harrison**



**THE MUSIC AND MIRTH OF  
HARRY SECOMBE**

## ESSEX DISCOVERY

### VISIT TO THE DOG'S TRUST REHOMING CENTRE AT NEVENDON



15 of went on this visit thanks to the suggestion of Joan Burgess. We were impressed with the extensive facilities and the care given to the homeless dogs looked after there

Stephanie introduced us to several of their guests, all in their individual kennels/cubicles with their names and stories displayed on the window. They all looked very comfortable with beds, blankets and toys as well as water bowls. She then explained that there are different accommodation blocks according to the needs, ages and personalities of each dog.

Some dogs are more sociable than others and so can cope with different human visitors, others are not so easy to manage. New arrivals are put in a separate block so that they can adjust to their new circumstances more quietly. Pregnant dogs and dogs with new puppies are also kept separately. Sometimes older dogs are kept apart from more boisterous guests.

Also within the building is a veterinary surgery which is equipped to give basic treatment. A hydrotherapy bath is a popular facility. Also, a training hall, for staff as well as dogs

There are more than 40 members of staff as well as volunteers. These include care teams, veterinary staff, behaviourists and trainers as well as essential admin people. Volunteers join in to help with walking the dogs in the various areas and compounds around the Centre.

Finding a new home for the dogs is a priority, either a permanent adoption or a temporary foster home. It is also possible to sponsor a particular dog if that is all a human can manage. Some dogs are found a forever home in a few weeks, other may take a little longer and some dogs become permanent guests.

We were not charged for this visit and tour which lasted an hour but we all happily gave a donation to the worthy cause.

## GOLF GROUP

### 2026 MARCH REPORT

February 19<sup>th</sup> was the third consecutive week on a driving range because the courses were too muddy. We played as a “five ball” on the virtual Royal Birkdale course at Stockbrook Manor driving range. The virtual championship course proved more difficult than our usual run of Essex courses – but we didn’t lose any balls! Nor get muddy shoes!

February 26<sup>th</sup> - At last! – on a real course ! Two u3A golfers were allowed on the real course at Cranham, where electric trolleys were prohibited to protect the fairways. It was very windy, which presumably helped to dry the course and give the ball a good roll on the fairways.

The March winds persisted at Cranham on 5<sup>th</sup> March giving the u3a four ball some challenges.



This picture shows the u3a golfers on the first tee at windy Hartswood on 12<sup>th</sup> March, looking down to the first green, a mere 286 yards to the pin. The course had many temporary greens with extra large holes to give players a chance of par scores! At the 5<sup>th</sup> par 3 hole all four players achieved par! And almost repeated the feat at the 7<sup>th</sup> hole!

Report from S.A.

## ARCHAEOLOGY 2

On the last Monday of February seven members of Archaeology 2 met up at the British Museum, having made their own way there from various parts of South East Essex.

The main purpose of our visit was to visit the **Samurai exhibition** but first, having met up at eleven o'clock, we decided to go on one of the "eye opener" tours that take place throughout the day.

These are run by volunteers, and are free of charge. In keeping with the theme of the day we decided to make our way up to the third floor and the Japanese Galleries where over the course of forty minutes our enthusiastic and knowledgeable guide showed us some of the main exhibits.

These ranged from the medieval period in Japan, through to the Edo-period which ran from 1615 to 1868, and finally some digital modern art from the 21st century.

After this we had time for a quick drink/snack before making our way to the Samurai Exhibition.

Most of our party had taken advantage of the Half Price tickets for Seniors that are available after noon. The exhibition aims to explore the life styles of the Samurai, who nowadays are largely seen as formidable fighters possessing ideals of courage, honour and self-sacrifice. Most of this is invented tradition, as we were to find out.

Originally starting as a warrior class in the 1100's, the Samurai developed in a long period of peace that started in Japan in 1615, to become an elite social class that included women. Samurai men formed the government with many serving as bureaucrats. They also became prominent in scholarship and the arts, with intellectual pursuits being seen as just as important as swordsmanship.

The story of the evolution of the Samurai is told through a series of exhibits including suits of armour as shown below, as well as paintings, calligraphy, and works of art including wooden chests, and jewellery.



All in all a fascinating exhibition and one we all thoroughly enjoyed, and which shone new light on a people it turned out we actually knew very little about.

## RAILWAY GROUP

### VISIT TO THE NATIONAL ARMY MUSEUM & THE ROYAL HOSPITAL CHELSEA

On a warm sunny spring morning we headed off for our visit to two iconic venues in Chelsea. First was the very modern National Army Museum, the leading authority on the British Army and its impact on society, examining the Army's role from the British Civil Wars to the modern day. Through its collections it preserves and shares stories of ordinary people with extraordinary responsibilities. The current new building (on the site of part of the Royal Hospital Chelsea which was destroyed by a bomb in WW11), was commissioned by the late Queen Elizabeth II, and is one of only 3 museums in the UK to hold a Royal Warrant.



On arrival our guide Chris Byrne gave us a great introduction to the museum, its history and the make-up of the various galleries, as we stood underneath a Lynx helicopter suspended above us. Trip organiser Richard Brown, who is familiar with the museum, led those who wanted to, around the current Beyond Burma Forgotten Armies exhibition. This commemorates the 80th anniversary of VJ Day (Victory over Japan Day) when WW11 ended on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1945. Others walked around looking at what they wanted to see.

A group discount had been arranged for lunch in the cafe, after which all but 2 of the group went next door to the Royal Hospital Chelsea. After a look at the interactive exhibition in Sloane Stable Yard, our private group tour guide Chelsea Pensioner Michael Vowles, wearing his magnificent "scarlet" dress uniform, sat us down to tell us about the foundation of the RHC, its history, how one can become one of the 300 Chelsea Pensioners, plus many informative and amusing stories.

He had done his research on our group and surprised most of us by explaining that both of our organisations had their origins in France – u3a started in Toulouse in 1972, and the Hotel des Invalides in Paris, built by his cousin King Louis 14<sup>th</sup>, inspired King Charles II to build the Royal Hospital Chelsea, to care for those of his army 'broken by age or war'. Michael had even researched the Basildon & Billericay u3a Group, had studied our events, and had a copy of our newsletter!

Michael, assisted by fellow Chelsea Pensioner Andy, explained that in 1681, King Charles commissioned Sir Christopher Wren to design it and it was completed in 1692, Michael took us around the grounds and explained how the stunning historic buildings had evolved over the centuries, as well as giving us an insider's perspective on what life is like as part of this unique retired "village" community. The current 281 Pensioners (the maximum is 300) are supported by an equal number of support and admin staff.



*Michael Vowles in his dress "scarlets"*

*Andy is wearing "in house blues"*

Overlooking the South Lawn, where the Chelsea Flower Show and 4 other annual events are held in order to help pay the Hospital's £2.2m running costs, is the Chillianwallah Memorial. This stands in memory of British casualties killed in the 1849 battle during the Second Anglo-Sikh War in Punjab, now part of modern-day Pakistan, between the armies of the British East India Company and those of the Sikh Kingdom. We looked at the impressive Singora cannon built in 1641. Grinling Gibbons' bronze statue of King Charles II, dressed as a Roman Emperor, dominates this Middle Court area.



We were taken around the magnificent Great Hall, now used as the dining hall, were told the origin of the scarlet uniform (worn by John Churchill, the first Duke of Marlborough in 1704) and why Nell Gwynn was still shown as an RCH "benefactor". We peeped through the door into the amazing Chapel but unfortunately we couldn't enter because the piano was being tuned!



*Some of the group tried on the tricorn three cornered hat – just to see how heavy it was!*

The tour should have lasted no more than 2 hours but we were still listening to Michael 20 minutes after that. Michael was then asked to finish so that that the Hospital could lock the gates! The excellent Heidi cafe kindly agreed to stay open a bit late for us so that we could all have a cup of tea with Michael before we left for home.

A long but fascinating and informative day, ably enhanced by our two excellent guides Chris and Michael

Report from R. & S. B.

## RAMBLING GROUP



We had a great walk from Paddington to King's Cross. 19 of us met at the statue of Paddington Bear in Paddington station.

Our walk took us to the Grand Union canal and Little Venice.

Our first stop was at a delightful chocolate shop where the hot chocolate came with a piece of chocolate. We then continued our walk along the Regents Canal, passing some amazing houses and London Zoo. From there we walked to Camden Lock where more refreshments were required. Our final two miles took us past old gasometers which have been converted into flats, and then the old railway coal yard, which is now a pleasant part of London.



## Rambling continued

Our April walk is a 5.5 mile circular walk in East Tilbury and will be led by Colin Eastman. **The start and meeting point is the car park at Coalhouse Fort RM18 8PB. This is a free carpark and we meet at 10.15am on 15 April.**

The drive time from Billericay is 30 minutes approx.

There are toilets at Coalhouse Fort. The walk is along the seawall concrete path towards Stanford le Hope, then turning inland towards East Tilbury railway station, and then returning across fields and lanes to East Tilbury village and Coalhouse Fort. The walk is flat with good paths and no stiles.

Lunch is available at the end of the walk at the Ship pub in East Tilbury village. The landlord has asked for a firm number of those eating to be confirmed the day before. He does not need the food choice until we sit down. **If you want to have food at the Ship please let Debbie How know by noon on Monday 13th April latest.**

As usual, please wear appropriate clothing and footwear. Boots help to protect your ankles.

All u3a members are welcome to turn up on the day. Please bring your u3a membership card. Please contact me (D. H. ) if you have any questions or require any more information

## Newsletter Contributions

If you have any items please send them by **12.00 Noon**  
**on Wednesday, 15<sup>h</sup> April 2026**

I am always happy to receive your report or comments at any time before the cut-off date. Please send all items in **editable format** to [bbu3anewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:bbu3anewsletter@gmail.com)

**If you are sending photos please send them separately in JPG format.**

Only send photos that you have taken yourself. We cannot use photos or pictures that have been downloaded from the internet, unless copyright free.

All contributions will be acknowledged.

Current and past newsletters can be viewed on our website <https://u3asites.org.uk/bb>

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(Editor)