



BASILDON AND BILLERICAY

u3a

NEWSLETTER No 391

JUNE 2026



STONEHENGE

THE SUMMER SOLSTICE IS ON JUNE 21st 2026

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Well, here we are again at the end of our u3a year! The members already on the committee are happy to stay another year, the members who have reached the end of their five years don't want to go.

Some members are reluctant to come forward. So why is that? Are you all incompetent, unable to communicate, don't like giving your opinion. **Obviously not the case**, so why not be counted where it matters and help our u3a in the process.

We have had a very successful year with groups flourishing thanks to our dedicated Coordinators and new groups started. We have listened to some interesting Speakers on a variety of subjects, sometimes we think maybe not my favourite subject, but then have enjoyed the talk, and in the process learned something. Also some subjects we did not want to miss, because the subject was important to us. Definitely a place for an open mind!!

So here is looking forward to another u3a year.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

AGM

Please don't forget that the 2026 AGM of Basildon and Billericay u3a will take place at 2.30pm on Friday 26th June at Canon Roche Hall.

Please bring your membership card. We hope to see as many of you as possible there. All are welcome.

There will also be a speaker from Billericay Banking Hub.

MONTHLY MEETING JULY 24TH 2026

Please note This is another month with FIVE Fridays

Speaker

Richard Pusey



"The London of Samuel Pepys"

RAMBLING GROUP

Our walk in May took place around the 500 acre Thordon Country Park on Wednesday 20th May with 11 members completing 6 ½ miles on a cloudy but warm day. We started the walk outside the Green Man Public House and crossed the A128 into the Country Park. We made our way through the woods and along the south edge of Old Hall Pond. Continuing westward along the open footpath. To the right in the woods was the site of the original Old Hall built in the 1080's but was burnt down in the early 1700's. To the left of the footpath offered us views towards the North Downs in Kent.



We continued following the footpath and headed into the woods and walked through the Gruffalo trail to the Essex Wildlife Trust Nature Discovery Centre where we had a short refreshment stop. We then continued eastwards along the footpath eventually passing Thorndon Golf Club to our right and the New Thorndon Hall to our left. The new Thorndon Hall was built in the 1760's by Lord Petre, a talented botanist and gardener. Around 100 years later the new hall burned down and remained in ashes until 1976 when developers rebuilt the hall into luxury apartments. We emerged from the County Park and crossed back over the A128 and made our way through a small estate and came to the grounds of St Nicolas Church where the group photograph was taken. The church was also built by Lord Petre and is thought to resemble a water tower by the locals. Unfortunately the church was closed so we were unable to gain access.

We retraced our steps back through the estate and onto a footpath that led to open fields. After following the path around the fields of rapeseed and broad beans, we then passed by the reservoir which brought us back to the Green Man PH and the end of our walk. A few of us had lunch at the pub before heading home.

There is no walk in June.

Our July walk is a cross country walk starting from Little Easton, near Great Dunmow. **We will meet at 10.15 on 15th July** outside the Tea Room of **Little Easton Manor, Park Road, Gt Dunmow CM6 2JN**, This is a 40 min drive from Billericay. This is the Manor's own car park. We have permission to park there.

We will walk along grassy footpaths and a concrete path on a circular walk. This walk is 5.9 miles long and relatively flat. There are 5 stiles in reasonable condition. There are no facilities on this walk until we get back to the Tea Room, where we can have lunch. When we tested this route in May we did see some deer. We walk past 3 lovely churches and an old WW2 Airfield and return via Great Easton.

Please bring your u3a membership card. There are refreshments available at the Tea Room so we can start the walk with a coffee!

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.

ESSEX VILLAGES GROUP

VISIT TO CLARE

The villages group went a little further afield than usual in June, to Clare, just over the border in Suffolk.

We met our guide in the Castle Country Park which is the only Country Park run entirely by volunteers. The Park exists on the site of a grand castle that was home to one of the wealthiest people in England with royal connections. Much of the castle has now gone, but the 60 foot high Norman motte, with the remains of a flint keep at its summit is still there. Spread out around the motte are the inner and outer baileys of the castle.

Within the bailey is the now redundant Clare Station which is believed to be the only one in the world built within the bailey of a castle. The buildings are Grade II listed. The Station was closed in the 60s but thanks in large part to a National Lottery Heritage Fund grant, the main station building now houses a thriving cafe as well as the Park office. The former goods shed is a unique exhibition/reception venue and the South platform waiting room is a visitor centre.



From here we walked to Clare Church which dates back to the 13th Century. This beautiful building dominates the north end of the town, reflecting the prosperity of Clare in the Middle Ages when the main trade was cloth-making. Many of the group were fascinated by the lectern which also functions as a money box! Opposite the church we were able to admire a most picturesque 14th century timber framed, Grade I listed building which is partly available to let and also houses Clare's small museum. Clare Conservation area contains 121 listed buildings of which 6 are Grade I listed, 11 Grade 2* listed and 104 Grade 2 listed.



The final stop on our tour was Clare Priory, founded in 1248 and the first house of Augustinian Friars in England. The Priory is still in use as a retreat centre and Catholic church. Our guide was keen to show us a stunning extension which has been sympathetically added on the original 13th/14th century infirmary, making a magnificent new church for the priory.

We concluded our visit with a good lunch at the Swan Inn

in the High Street.



ESSEX DISCOVERY

VISIT TO THE CASTLE POINT TRANSPORT MUSEUM



We were made very welcome by the volunteers here at the Transport Museum based in the old bus garage on Canvey Island. We were booked in for a group tour and they opened for us specially.

There are dozens of vintage buses here, most privately owned and being restored. We were able to get into several which provoked a lot of memories and conversations.

The guides were very knowledgeable and explained to us the differences between the

various vehicles. They also described the difficulties of working with vehicles needing parts and materials no longer readily available.

The building itself is an on-going project to make it fit for purpose as a venue of interest. A café has been built and a museum area is under way. There are also plans to have an area available for group meetings as well as a very large model railway, which will be running on open days when the upper floor is readily accessible.

We were treated to a drink and biscuits in their staff room after the tour and the volunteers entertained us with tales of what it was like working on the buses when they were employed. They also explained the efforts that they are making to become recognised as a valuable asset to the Island



There was no charge for our visit, but we left a donation in recognition of our enjoyable time.

Please see their website for information about open days and events, we would thoroughly recommend the visit

Canvey Island Transport Museum: 105 Point Road SS8 7TD

canveyislandtransportmuseum.co.uk

For lunch afterwards we drove to the Labworth Café by the sea wall, also to be recommended

RAILWAY JOURNEYS

VISIT TO THE NATIONAL HORSERACING MUSEUM AT NEWMARKET



For our June trip we started out on the 300 bus from Billericay to Chelmsford station. We then had a pleasant rail journey through the Essex and Suffolk countryside, via Stowmarket, to Newmarket. Our destination was the National Horse Racing Museum where you can learn all you could possibly need to know about horses. The five acre site includes 12 galleries covering the history of racing and all different aspects of the sport including detailed information about bloodlines, care of horses and their physical attributes. There is also a lot of information about the whole industry of racing and all the people involved such as owners, trainers, jockeys, vets and all the supporting personnel.

The photo shows our group in front of the statue of 'Frankel,' a renowned and now retired thoroughbred racehorse

There are lots of interactive displays and even a racehorse simulator used to train jockeys, which several of the group tried but at a sedate trot rather than the 40 mph gallop of a professional jockey! The volunteer running this was an ex jockey herself and like all the volunteers on site very friendly and knowledgeable. At 2pm we had an opportunity to meet one of the two retired racehorses in the stable yard together with two Shetland ponies who



keep the horses company. It was interesting to meet a racehorse close up and to be able to admire his magnificent physique and coat. Again we learnt a lot from the guide.

The museum is also home to the British Sporting Trust's Art collection and you can view an impressive range of racing art dating back to the 17th century and including works by Stubbs and Munnings.

Once we had checked in at the museum we were able to enter and leave the site as we wished and most to the group headed into Newmarket town centre (just a few minutes' walk away) for lunch. However some managed to secure a booking in the on-site restaurant.



Although the forecast had threatened thunder storms the weather was very kind to us and we all agreed that despite having no particular interest in horse racing it had been an enjoyable and informative day out.

4 MILE MAX

The June walk will take place on Thursday 25 June at Thorndon Park South at 10.30. This is a walk of just under 4 miles, with no stiles, over smooth ground although there are a couple of short uphill sections.

If coming along the A127 you will need to take the A128 turn off for Brentwood and Thorndon Park South is sign posted on your left. If coming from Billericay on the A128 then it will be signposted on your right. The postcode given is not accurate and will take you to a point further down the road. There is a charge for parking, but you can use a card.

Weather should be cooler next week.

Newsletter Contributions

If you have any items please send them by **12.00 Noon**
on Wednesday, 15th July 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

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)