



BASILDON AND BILLERICAY

u3a

NEWSLETTER No 393

AUGUST 2026



**August in Edinburgh
Military Tattoo and Fringe Festival**

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

As I sit down to write this there has been just a little shower of rain which has been enough to revive a few blades of grass. So, like this, any support you give to your u3a, however small, will make a difference.

In June next year the Treasurer and myself will have reached our limit of five years on the Committee and must step down. If either of these posts appeal to you please speak to us for more information.

So, the question you may ask is: have we enjoyed our time on the Committee? The simple answer is yes, it has been enjoyable and rewarding.

MONTHLY MEETING August 28th 2026

SPEAKER Tom Hind

“The History of Magic”

plus a demonstration of magic tricks.



NEXT MONTH

September 25th 2026

The welcome return of Tony Harris.

You have seen him as Henry VIII, Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher.

Now enjoy his new portrayal of Donald Trump!

RAILWAY GROUP

AUGUST VISIT

In early August, 15 of us set off for a return visit to the Epping Ongar Railway. This used to be part of the Central Line but with declining passenger numbers London Transport withdrew passenger services from Epping to Ongar in 1994. Eventually it was purchased by the present owner and extensive renovations have taken place to restore this part of the line for future generations as a heritage railway. There are a small number of paid staff, but it is the army of volunteers who have helped to bring the railway back to life for the many visitors to enjoy throughout the year.

From Billericay we travelled one stop to Shenfield where we boarded the heritage bus number 339 to Ongar. This brought back memories as we rattled along through the pretty countryside. Some of the group sat upstairs and some downstairs but we all sat on separate seats which probably indicates that people were smaller when the bus was first in operation!



We arrived at Ongar station to see the steam train had just arrived and after a quick look round we boarded the train to North Weald passing Blake Hall station on the way. This is now a private residence. The pictures show the signal box at North Weald and the view from the bridge above the steam locomotive, "Pitchford Hall."



At North Weald we had plenty of time for a coffee before boarding the train again. During our return to Ongar we were served with our fish and chips, which were brought to our table. On our arrival we were served with our ice cream dessert. From here we returned to Shenfield station, again by heritage bus, but this time by a 'Greenline' bus.



RAMBLING GROUP

Due to the recent hot weather our July walk to Little Easton was postponed until August. For July Brian stepped in to provide us with a 6 miler with glorious views of the countryside combined with shade, starting from Fryerning, near Ingatestone. Starting an hour earlier also ensured none of us got overheated! Sadly, we didn't see any deer but did see we did pass by Lord Petre's home. The Petre family have played major roles in English political and religious history for over 400 years and still own Ingatestone Hall. We also observed a traditional 'ice house'.



As our photo shows we were fortunate to arrive at the pub just as it opened, so we recharged with food and drink, as you do.

Our next ramble in August is at Little Easton, near Dunmow as previously detailed for July

September walk

This will be from South Benfleet to Leigh on Sea. We'll meet on Wed 16th in the free car park at South Benfleet Playing Fields. The playing fields are just past the H.O.M.E. hub towards the end of Brook Road SS75JF. You'll need to drive past the bowling green entrance and continue along Brook Road till you get to the hub.

The hub community centre has newly constructed toilets and donation based tea/ coffee from 9.30 am. Their phone number is 07720710698

We'll meet at the car park around 10.15 to start the walk at 10.30. The estimated finishing time is approximately 12.30pm.

We will cross the playing fields to pick up the coastal path to Leigh on Sea. The walk is moderate, relatively flat, along the sea wall and Benfleet Creek and is about 4.5 miles long.

Please bring your u3A membership card with you and as usual appropriate clothing and footwear. There are no facilities till we get to Leigh so do bring water, etc with you. We'll stop about half way to have a drinks break, if necessary.

There are plenty of places to eat and drink in Leigh. As this isn't a circular walk we'll need to catch a bus (25-30 minutes) or train (4 minutes) back to our cars.

ARCHAEOLOGY GROUP

The last Monday in July saw nine members of the Archaeology group brave the heatwave conditions to meet up in Maldon for a guided tour, looking at historical and archaeology related sites in and around the High Street.

First, of course, there was the important topic of meeting up for lunch which we had in Mrs Salisbury's just off the High Street, and which we were subsequently to learn was also of historical importance, not least due to its association with one Edward Bright, of whom we were to hear much more, and who had lived most of his life there.

We met up with our guide, Vicky, and her husband Ian, outside the library at two o'clock and over the course of the next ninety minutes or so we traversed the High Street with Vicky pointing out places of interest and giving us their background. This included two of the original cinema buildings now used for other purposes, but which were thriving in the first half of the 20th century, as well as taking us much further back to the early days of Maldon when it was an Anglo-Saxon settlement.

We also learnt about the Battle of Maldon in 991 when the local Anglo-Saxon Ealdorman, Byrhtnoth, made a crucial mistake. He allowed the Viking hordes, who were only able to approach the shore by a causeway and which limited them to moving four abreast, to come completely ashore and line up against his army: the result... well let's say it went badly and the Vikings took his severed head back to Norway as a trophy!

In more recent times the surnames Plume and Bright also played large parts in the town's history. Although the Plume Library is closed on a Monday we still learnt about Thomas Plume, who was a wealthy local merchant and benefactor. The Library still contains over eight thousand of the books and pamphlets he had collected, as well as a tapestry of the Battle of Maldon.

We then made a stop outside the Moot Hall (which we had visited a couple of years earlier), before making our way into the welcome cool of All Saints Church, outside which are statues of some of the towns important figures, again including Thomas Plume.

From here we went to the nearby Blue Boar Inn, a former coaching inn, whilst near here is one of Maldon's hidden gems. The photo below shows the former vicarage, a stunning timbered framed building that dates back to the 15th century. Sadly this is currently closed to the public.





Our walk around Maldon finished by this plaque to Edward Bright, who lived from 1721 to 1750, and who was known as the "Fat Man of Maldon." He was reputedly the largest gentleman in England, weighing in at forty nine stones, and his waistcoat was said to be able to fit seven people at once. When he died in the property that now houses Mrs Salisbury's cafe, one of the walls had to be demolished to get the body out.

All in all a very informative trip with an insight into one of Essex's loveliest towns, and with plenty of places to potentially visit at a future date.

FOUR MILE MAX

There will be no walk this month (August 27th) due to the hot weather and also other commitments. Hopefully there will be one in September but it will probably be the last one. I am unable to carry on with this Group, so if anyone would like to take over as co-ordinator please let me know. It would be a shame if it came to an end.

Newsletter Contributions

If you have any items please send them by **12.00 Noon**
on Wednesday, 16th September 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 bbu3newsletter@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)