

FEBRUARY 2026

CHAIR'S REPORT

Hello everyone,

As I type this I am enjoying my Christmas amaryllis which is such a wonderful present as I can watch it grow; it's one of God's wonders.

We are having some very dreary weather but we are trying hard to take every opportunity, when the sun shines, to get out for a short time to enjoy it. Last week, we went to visit my friend, Mary, who has moved to Westcliffe where we went for a walk on the seafront, enjoyed fish and chips and a ride on the train. We drove home in the rain but it was so nice to spend time in the sun and see a friend, I hope you are all doing the same.



Our u3a gives us opportunity to spend time with friends and to make new friends. Is there something you enjoy doing, perhaps you could start a group to share this activity with others? [All our new members are warmly invited to a Welcome Meeting which will be held on Friday 24 April 2-4pm at The Link Social Club; it will give our "newbies" the opportunity to meet the committee and group facilitators.](#)

My play reading group is enjoying an Oscar Wilde play, "The Ideal Husband" but we chatted so much we did not get to finish it so we will do that next month. We enjoy old and new plays; we like a variety and everyone gets a turn to choose. The gardening group went to the Gibberd Garden yesterday to see the snowdrops, always a delight at this time of year. We went the previous Sunday also, do go if you have the chance.

We visited Harlow Museum last week, it's open on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday from 9:30am to 3:30pm. It's good to find somewhere indoors, that's free and you can take the grandchildren. There are lots of Roman finds as well as many interesting bikes.

[I hope to see you at our monthly meeting on 23 February at The Link.](#) **Jane Winterbotham**

SECRETARY'S NOTES

It was encouraging to see members engaged in our organisation at the AGM on 26 January. We welcome new trustee, Peter Houghton, who has now joined the committee. The proposal to alter our constitution, so that Harlow u3a registered office can be changed if required, was passed; it was also noted that next year's AGM will take place in February 2027.

THANK YOU, GROUP FACILITATORS

Following the AGM at The Link Social Club last month, a thank you lunch was held for the group facilitators.

It was an opportunity to share updates with the leaders and for them to chat with their peers over a cup of tea and a sandwich. We are very grateful to our facilitators for all the time and effort they dedicate to run the groups and to provide lots of opportunities for Harlow u3a members.

Remember, if you have an idea for a new interest group the committee is only too happy to help you get it started. Likewise, if a group is full help is available to start an additional group.



One action which was announced at the meeting, is that the Facilitators' Handbook is being updated and group leaders who would like to help with this task are invited to contact Vipin Patel.

HOW TO READ AN ENGLISH CHURCH

At January's meeting, members continued with the talks on How To Read An English Church presented by Revd. Nicholas Henderson. He further outlined the changes as a result of the Reformation and the introduction of a much simpler form of worship and church interior which moved away from what were seen as "idolatrous" practices. By the mid- 17th century, a vast number of churches had been "cleansed" of idolatry: fixed altars, crucifixes, images of the Virgin Mary and of saints were removed and statues defaced.



One central feature of the church, the altar, was replaced by a communion table where the congregation gathered around for, by then, infrequent communion services – sometimes as few as three a year. The architecture of churches became much simpler and the church was seen to be a "room to preach in" and to expound the Bible. Internally, the pulpit became the central focus and box pews could be found where the congregation sat and listened to the minister. (As seen in St Mary's, Whitby, pictured left.) In some churches, a large egg-timer was placed by the pulpit for the preacher to time his lesson.

Sometimes, groans were heard when the sands had emptied into the bottom half only for the preacher to turn it over and continue!

A unique aspect of English churches which Nicholas talked about was bell ringing – English Change Ringing – involving ringing the bells in a mathematical sequence to avoid repetition. Bell-ringer and mathematician, Fabian Stedman, created graphs to show how the bells moved through sequences. The number of bells in situ dictate the number of changes available. A collection of twelve bells could ring 479,000+ changes - it would take thirty years to ring them all!

We also learnt some interesting facts about funeral practices. The lych-gate, which can be found at the entrance of church grounds, takes its name from the Old English word *lych* meaning *corpse*. In the days when most people died at home and there were no mortuaries, it was common practice for the deceased to be taken to the lych gate on a bier and remain there until the funeral took place.

Memorials, tombs and coffins changed over time. Conspicuous tombs indicated wealth and sometimes profession. By the 19th century steel-lined, lockable coffins were prevalent to deter body-snatchers, keen to make money by providing cadavers to anatomists. Nicholas informed us that a typical medieval churchyard might contain 5000 burials and that in areas where flooding happened regularly, the church yard would be artificially raised to prevent graves from being flooded and corpses exposed.



13th century lych gate



Members chatted to Nicholas after his talk

Unfortunately, time was against Nicholas and the last section of the talk was rushed. He outlined how the previously discarded “Roman” practices were gradually re-introduced in the late 19th century into the 20th: vestments, colour, hymns architectural styles started to revert. In the second half of the 20th century Dom George Dix’s publication of *The Shape of the Liturgy* and the 2nd Vatican Council had significant impact on church practice with the worshippers becoming more actively involved. This

would have been an interesting area to explore further but, regrettably, lack of time prevented it. Thank you, Nicholas, for another enlightening talk.

FUTURE GUEST SPEAKERS

- 23 Feb.** [My TUTU Went AWOL!](#) A trained opera singer, Iestyn’s talk includes excerpts from his West End shows and tells how he accidentally went on tour dancing Sugar Plum around the war-zones of Iraq and Afghanistan, raising the morale of British troops - in a tutu! [Iestyn’s experiences were featured in The Times recently.](#)

The Link
Iestyn Edwards
- 23 March** [The Music and Satire of Gilbert and Sullivan.](#) Bernard is a life-long enthusiast of Gilbert & Sullivan with special interest in the background to the works, their satire and precise theatrical genre.

The Link
Bernard Lockett
- 27 April** [Spring Social.](#) We look forward to welcoming back singer and musician, Gary Benjafield, who will be entertaining us with lots of favourite tunes.

The Link

VISITS & OUTINGS

The V&O Team has two outings on offer at the General Meeting on Monday 23 February. The first is to **Brooklands Motor & Aviation Museum** in Weybridge, Surrey, on **Tuesday 14th April** for **£34.50 per person**.

2026 marks the 100th anniversary of Britain's 1st Grand Prix, which was held at the Brooklands race circuit. January 2026 also marked the 50th anniversary of Concorde's 1st commercial flight and you can explore this iconic machine - additional charges may apply for some of the experiences on offer. As well as Concorde, there are vintage buses, motorcycles, classic cars, and racing cars for your close inspection. Then visit the Sunbeam cafe in the clubhouse for drinks, food, cakes snacks and ice creams (honestly, I hope it's ice-cream weather!)



Our second trip is to **Kinky Boots the Musical** on **Thursday 21 May for £59pp**, starring Johannes Radebe of Strictly fame as Lola & Matt Cardle as Charlie Price. The musical runs at the London Coliseum for a limited season only. The familiar story tells of when Charlie Price inherits a failing family footwear factory and struggles to turn the factory's fortune, and his love-life, around. He then meets Lola; can they work together, with everyone around them, and stand a little taller....

The music and lyrics are by Cyndi Lauper, the musical story written by Geoff Dean and Tim Firth and is mostly inspired by true events, telling the story of Steve Pateman who, in 1990, saved his family owned Northamptonshire shoe factory (W.J.Brooks) by designing high heeled boots in men's sizes under the brand name Devine. The story was first featured in a BBC documentary Trouble at the Top: The Kinky Boot Factory. A story of acceptance - accepting yourself, and others for who they are- the importance of kindness, understanding and friendship, and one not to be missed.



To ensure we are able to go on this, we have to pay for the tickets within three days of the u3a meeting on 23 February, so please don't put off your purchase, we cannot extend our payment date as we've been advised that these tickets are selling out fast.

Payment can be made by cash, cheque - made payable to Harlow u3a - or by using the card machine. Reservations cannot be taken prior to the meeting, if you are unable to attend the meeting then please contact Barbara Abbott AFTER the meeting between the hours of 10am and 6pm. To contact her follow this link and scroll down to Visits and Outings. <https://harlow.u3asite.uk/group-facilitators-email-contact/>

The team look forward to seeing you at the trips desk at 10am on Monday 23 February.
Hazel Sugarman

CONTACTING FACILITATORS

To contact facilitators regarding group activities, follow the link below which will take you to a list of the groups and their facilitators; by clicking on the facilitator you wish to message you will open a Contact page to complete. <https://harlow.u3asite.uk/group-facilitators-email-contact/>

SOCIAL SUNDAYS GROUP

Are you looking for a group with whom to enjoy an outing on a Sunday? Well, Social Sundays is perfect for you! Member, Denise Beard, has taken over as group facilitator for this purely social group which will meet for lunch one Sunday per month at a pub or restaurant in or near Harlow. Denise hopes to arrange the first date for some time in March. If you are interested in finding out more, Denise will be at the General Meeting at The Link next Monday or you can contact her by following this link and scrolling down to Social Sundays : <https://harlow.u3asite.uk/group-facilitators-email-contact/>

ARE YOU A FRIENDLY PERSON WILLING TO HELP NEW MEMBERS?

If you joined Harlow u3a on your own, without the support of a partner or friend, you may remember attending General Meetings at The Link and feeling a bit nervous about not knowing anyone, not knowing where to sit or who to talk to. Harlow u3a is grateful for the work done by our Meeters and Greeters who welcome members on arrival but we recognise that we also need others to look after new members during those early meetings until they find their feet and make new friends.

We are looking for friendly members who will help our newest members feel welcomed and valued by inviting them to sit with them, chat with them and answer any questions they may have about our organisation. If that's you, then please contact Chrissy Williams who will be leading this New Members' Support group. Click on the group facilitator link above and scroll down for New Members' Support Group.

New Members' Meeting

Our new members are warmly invited to come along to a Welcome Meeting at The Link Social Club on

Friday 24 April 2-4pm

Come along for a cuppa, meet our committee and group facilitators and find out more about Harlow u3a.

BOOK YOUR SPOT AT U3A FESTIVAL 26

u3a Festival 26 brings the movement together for fun, learning and new connections. Join in on [Wednesday 1 July - Friday 3 July 2026](#) at [The University of York](#) for a celebration of everything that makes u3a so special.

There's a huge variety of activities on offer - here's a taster of what you can look forward to:

- Sparking new ideas at talks on a wide range of subjects.
- Getting moving at a fitness workshop or in a sports tournament.
- Exploring your creativity with hands-on craft workshops.
- Enjoying live performances by talented u3a musical groups - or have a go at making music yourself.

Places are limited - book your tickets and accommodation now to avoid missing out. Please note that tickets and accommodation are booked via separate links, which you'll find below.

[FESTIVAL TICKETS](#)

[BOOK ACCOMMODATION](#)

WINNERS AND FINALISTS OF THE U3A SHORT STORY COMPETITION 2025-6

The u3a is proud to present the finalists for the u3a short story competition 2025-26. These top 14 stories were chosen from 525 entries - our highest number ever! We are delighted to announce the overall winner as **Janet from Woking Area u3a** in the South East with her story 'Woman in the tree walk'. Second place goes to **Sarah from Hartley Witney u3a** in the South East with her story 'Finding the key to lost memories' and 3rd place goes to **Christina from Guernsey u3a** in the South East for her story 'Little boy lost'. Follow this link to read the stories: [SHORT STORIES](#)

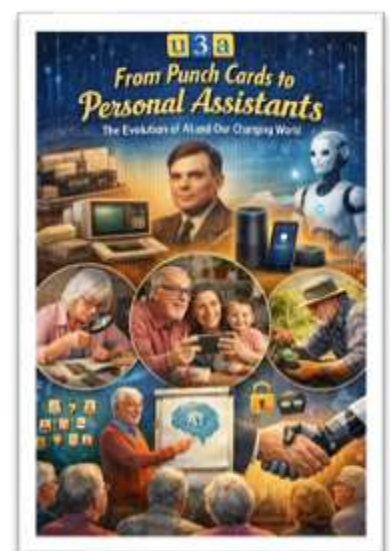
LEARNING EVENT: THE EVOLUTION OF AI AND OUR CHANGING WORLD

The workshops offered to Harlow u3a members by the AI Centre for Harlow proved to be popular with members but, regrettably, the spaces filled up very quickly and not everyone who was interested was able to book a place. If you were disappointed you might like to join this [FREE ONLINE EVENT](#).

Join Barry Claydon on **11 MARCH 2-3PM**, as he talks about the impact AI is having, and will have, on people, relationships and society. AI is the new chapter in a story that started two hundred years ago. AI is the new noisy kid on the block, it can do amazing things -make good things better and bad things worse. How is your AI literacy? After this event you will feel more confident, moving from AI ignorance to AI literacy.

Click here to reserve your place:

[AI TRAINING](#)





COLOUR QUIZ: ALL THE ANSWERS CONTAIN A COLOUR

1. The world's first National Park, established in USA in 1872.
2. The Skye terrier who mourned over his master's grave in Edinburgh for 14 years.
3. What flowers were gathered in the Spring according to an Ivor Novello song?
4. Who had a number one hit with the song, "So What" in 2008?
5. 1971 film starring Malcolm McDowell as a classical music-loving sociopath.
6. What is the name of Popeye's girlfriend?
7. What do we call an extended run of success eg in sport?
8. A word meaning a young deer and behaviour intended to flatter in a servile manner?

LOCAL HARLOW NEWS

NEW MONTHLY SENIORS CLUB IN HARLOW

Maria warmly invites you to join a new, free, monthly seniors club in Harlow. There are free refreshments and a 30 minute chair yoga session every month.

Venue: The Hub, Gilden Park Fieldfare Way, CM17 0GJ (Located behind the Londis store)
Free parking is available along the road.

Time: 1pm – 3pm

Save the dates for the next five months for 2026 sessions:

Friday, 27 February
Friday, 27 March
Friday, 03 April
Friday, 29 May
Friday, 26 June

Share with a friend, meet new people, and this year, we will be focusing on wellness, information, advice, and guidance to help you live well. We look forward to welcoming you. Maria.

HARLOW POETRY OPEN

2026 COMPETITION

Join in to mark World Poetry Day 2026 with a celebration of Harlow's writing talent.

For all ages & FREE to enter

Theme: Memory

Who can enter?

Adults, children and young people who live, work or learn in Harlow.

Categories: 7-10, 11-17, 18+

Submission deadline: 1st March

Announcement of winners: 21st March

To enter and for more information, follow this link:

[HARLOW POETRY OPEN](#)

GIVE US A HAND OR PAW – AN INVITATION FROM PARNDON MILL GALLERY

As part of our upcoming exhibition **8 March-19 April**, which is commemorating Queen Elizabeth, our most travelled monarch who extended the hand of friendship to the many people she met during her long reign, we are putting together a community collage of hands made by individuals or groups. **'Give us a hand or paw'**.

This will be displayed on 19 April at our community day to which you are all invited. We are asking for a stiff paper or card hand or paw shape in any design. A message of friendship is also acceptable.

We would be delighted if your group or community would take part. **We need the work delivered to the gallery at Parndon Mill by 9 April. Chris Golding Parndon Mill**

Currently showing at Parndon Mill Gallery is Glasshaus XVIII, a bold, diverse exhibition celebrating the expressive possibilities of glass: kiln-formed, blown, stained and sand cast. Featuring resident artists Ewa Wawrzyniak, Jon Lewis, Yuki Kokai, Muna Zuberi & Margery Lovatt alongside 35 member artists from JUST GLASS <https://www.just-glass.co.uk/>

ESSEX COUNCIL CONCESSIONARY BUS FARE RESEARCH

Essex Council invites you to take part in a survey to understand why people are using concessionary bus passes less than before. Improving concessionary bus pass use is important because:

- using the bus helps older people and those with disabilities stay connected to friends and family, access health and care facilities, and high streets and retail centres.
- the funding bus providers receive from concessionary bus passes is vital in helping services retain commercial viability. Fewer trips by concessionary pass holders can threaten the sustainability of routes across the network, affecting communities throughout Essex.

Here is a link to a short survey that asks about people's travel habits and views on using the bus, so the council can help understand how to better improve services for residents across the county.

[CONCESSIONARY BUS FARE SURVEY](#)

CALLING ALL KNITTERS

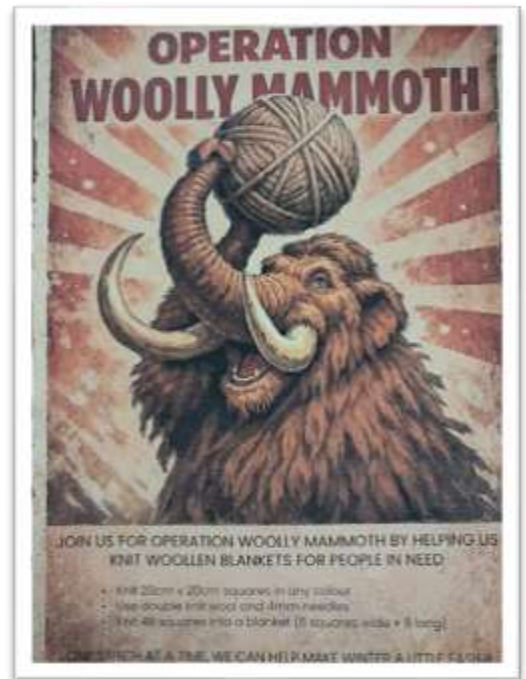
Tye Green Lodge Care Home is asking for support from any members who are keen knitters with a project they are working on this winter. [Operation Woolly Mammoth](#).

They are appealing for knitted squares to be made into blankets and these will be distributed to people in need.

Can you help?

- **Knit 20cm x 20cm squares in any colour**
- **Use double knit wool and 4mm needles**
- **Knit 48 squares into a blanket – 6 squares wide and 8 squares long**

So grab those needles and start knitting!



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

23 February	General Meeting	The Link Social Club CM19 4RT	10am-12pm
9 March	Committee Meeting	St James's Church	10am-12pm
13 March	Deadline for March Newsletter		
21 March	Trip to Thriplow Daffodil Weekend		
23 March	General Meeting	The Link Social Club	10am-12pm
14 April	Trip to Brooklands Motor and Aviation Museum		
24 April	Welcome Meeting for New Members	The Link Social Club	2-4pm

GET IN TOUCH

You can contact [Committee Members and Facilitators](#) by email through links on the website. harlow.u3asite.uk. Using this method keeps personal information out of the public domain. The [Harlow U3A Newsletter](#) is published by Harlow U3A, a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), Registered Charity Number 1197680. The registered office of the CIO is in England, at 2 Wych Elm, Harlow, Essex, CM20 1QP. [Contact the Editor](#) with comments and contributions at: harlowu3anewsletter@gmail.com

COFFEE TIME QUIZ ANSWERS

1 Yellowstone Park

2. Greyfriars Bobby

3. Lilacs

4. Pink

5. A Clockwork Orange

6. Olive Oil

7. Purple Patch

8. Fawn