



Affiliated to the Third Age Trust
Registered Charity No. 1165448

Newsletter

Issue 124

Summer 2026

Hello to all our members,

I am sitting here writing this in the middle of a heatwave in what is likely to be the hottest May on record! To think that only five weeks ago, I was trying to escape what seemed to be a very long, wet and cold winter and spring by heading to Tenerife for a week in the sun. Unfortunately, they were also experiencing a colder than usual Spring!

The AGM in March saw big changes to our committee. A new Chairman and a new Treasurer were elected and one new member joined the Committee. No Secretary or Minutes Secretary were elected, but other members with vital posts on the Committee were re-elected. Being new to this committee I am grateful to all the existing and previous members of the Committee for their support. I am particularly grateful for the way in which we have been able to share the jobs normally done by the Secretary. Brenda Last has offered to continue as a committee member and take on the role of Minutes Secretary, a role to which she has been enthusiastically co-opted.

Paul Taylor, our new Treasurer, has spent the last two months battling with the huge challenges of changing the banking mandates and has at last been successful.

Our Lecture Organisers have been busy, and we now have a full program of monthly lectures to take us through to July 2027. Our Interest Groups continue to flourish, and we have recently had an offer of adding another group to the list. We are, however, still looking for volunteer(s) to take on responsibility for organising Garden and Theatre Visits.

By the time you read this we will be well on the way to our summer break, so I wish you all the best for the summer and look forward to seeing you all at one of our monthly lectures.

Malcolm Chalmers

The History of English Pantomime

Jim Stebbings was our speaker for December.

English pantomime has been developed from earlier theatrical traditions beginning in Greece, "pantomime" being Greek for "all performed in mime". The early entertainments would have been performed by masked dancers, there being a preoccupation with vice, executions and prisoners. In 16th. century Italy there appeared the old man, Pantalone, and the innocent young girl, Columbine, who had to be rescued by the hero.

In France slapstick was introduced as part of threatening behaviour, still used in Punch and Judy. They also added Harlequin, a peasant with magical powers, wearing a multicolour costume. He could indicate a mood by pointing to the appropriate colour on his costume, for instance yellow for jealousy. Then Pierrot, the servant of Pantalone, a stupid, awkward country bumpkin was added.

This form of entertainment came to England in the early 18th. century, John Rich being the first English Harlequin, performing at Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre.

This was the first theatre with a proscenium stage enabling scenery to be used. They also began to include animals, illusions and stunts but were still in mime. Only performances licensed by the King's Charter could have speaking parts. This was repealed in 1843 when the Lord Chamberlain was responsible for vetting the content and spoken dialogue was introduced.

Gradually fairy stories were added and the original characters morphed into the characters from the stories. The clown replaced Harlequin and the productions included songs and intervals. The Victorians loved technology and other innovations such as transformation scenes were possible.

With the popularity of Music Hall parts were found for the popular entertainers of the day. Dan Leno was the first Dame in 1880 and Vesta Tilley took the part as principle boy. This trend has continued and as fashions and sensibilities have changed the jokes and innuendoes will be amended to continue to provide the fun filled entertainment.

Mary Dunbavin

AI Everywhere

The February talk, given by Ian Hawker, was attended by 170 members and 5 guests. Probably the largest meeting attendance since COVID reflecting that our members are concerned about the possible effects of AI. Certainly if the comments I heard as people left the meeting can be believed we all felt more concerned than when we arrived.

AI makes decisions on its own and works in a similar way to the human brain. In 2024 235 billion dollars was spent on AI and by 2028 this figure will rise to 630 billion. The investment is money driven and has no ethical input.

In twenty years AI will work a 1000 times faster than now and AI already works much faster than we do. AI does not understand but it has very low operating expenses although it uses a large amount of water to keep cool. The problem is that we do not know how it works but then we do not really know how our brain works.

AI is already used for improvement in medical analysis and treatment. AI hearing aids will dramatically improve the quality of hearing which is excellent news if, like me, you use

current versions. AI will be of assistance to visually impaired people and can undertake medical diagnosis with 99% accuracy. In about ten years it could be used for mass health screening and will help discover new drugs. This will enable your doctor to accurately diagnose your ailments and offer you a better medical solution.

In addition AI already makes contributions to education and these will increase and improve. AI will help to reduce the existing legal backlog. We are scared of driverless cars but remember 95% of accidents are caused by human input.

In time robots will become more humanoid and will teach themselves. Now I do find that worrying particularly as AI is already heavily involved in military activity.

There is no doubt that AI is growing fast and will continue to do so. It is important that, to use the clear benefits to humanity, we need to make sure that in twenty years AI has not taken control. A really interesting and thought provoking talk.

Laurie Marshall

The World of Auctions and Antiques

Following the AGM on 2nd March, Ed Crichton gave a very entertaining talk on the subject of Auctions and Antiques. Ed has worked for Lacy Scott and Knight Auctioneers in Bury St Edmunds for 30 years, following in his father's footsteps. Ed's father, Peter Crichton ran the livestock market in its heyday when Bury had one of the larger ones in the area, if not the country and was one of the last to go.

While they now have a purpose-built Auction Centre, in 1980 they held quarterly fine arts sales in the Athenaeum. The building was hired from 5am on a Monday morning until 10pm on a Tuesday night, selling some 2000 lots. General furniture would be sold in the open sheds of the livestock market. After one occasion where the weather was atrocious they decided they needed a purpose built centre, from which today's centre has grown.

Ed came into the world of auctions after leaving university with a media degree, which he found was not a lot of use when it came to getting a job, and so with the persuasion of his father, he applied for a job as a porter for Lacy Scott and Knight. The job of porter he describes as one of the best jobs, because you are in there from the start in the van picking up

items that you then follow on a journey until sold. He said he had many stories he could tell about his life as a porter, the one he told us was when they went to a house clearance at Stanton when, having loaded the van, they forgot to close the van door, so leaving a trail of chairs along the A143.

The antiques world has changed over the years and the value at which items are now being sold has dropped considerably. The younger generation are no longer interested in buying old things, so antiques that were selling for £1500 are now only making £150, or even less.

These days the sales they are best known for, outside of East Anglia, are the Toy and Model Sales. They have six sales a year, the recent one generating sales of £230,000. They have a building especially for Toy sales and are increasing the number of sales per year, with many of them being online only. He told the story about selling a model of Holborn station, which was expected go for around £8,000, but finally sold for £37,000. Ed continued to tell us about the many different types of sales they do and could have continued for much longer.

Paul Taylor

Adventure, Activism and the Climate Crisis

Having had a career in teaching, our speaker for April, Edward Gildea, decided he needed to have some adventure in his life so signed up for a section of the Round the World Yacht races. Having enjoyed his first experience he applied again for later races and as a result he has sailed around the world.

He explained how he had to learn about reading the weather when on watch as it was necessary to sail at the fastest speed possible. In the tropics there were large cloud formations that could hide changes in conditions.

He described the hectic times when it was necessary to often change or reset sails. He talked about the heat in some parts of the oceans where the water temperature was too hot to use for a baby's bath, and he had seen the now dead coral reefs.

He has visited other areas and noted that the snow and ice is becoming less white and is not reflecting sunlight but is absorbing it resulting in increased melting. In some countries the irrigation of crops in the summer relies on the presence of melt water but this is becoming reduced. Even ski slopes are closing down. We were provided with the alarming statistics that indicate climate change is real.

As a result he stood in the last General Election for the Green Party. He said politicians were good on targets but bad on delivery. COP meetings suffered from a conflict between vested interests and planetary realism.

Mary Dunbavin

All About Scams

The May meeting was attended by 131 members to hear a talk given by Rosemary Kemp, an Active Support Advisor at Mid Suffolk Citizens Advice Bureau.

We live in a world with ever increasing fraud activity aimed at extracting funds from the vulnerable people. Unfortunately we, as retired people, are vulnerable targets for fraudsters and this was a valuable opportunity for us all to be reminded of the things to avoid.

Rosemary reminded us not to move bank funds when asked to do so as part of an unsolicited phone call. Tell the fraudster that you will speak to your bank yourself to confirm the situation and remember that if you give your bank details to a fraudster the bank will not compensate you.

Very few of us have any knowledge of Bitcoins and we should be very careful of losing money to a Bitcoin fraudster. This is so important as Bitcoins are becoming more common.

Fraudsters are really trying to obtain your bank details and other personal information from you and will often ask for a very small payment just to get information. These people will make every effort to get your passwords from you and will take time to compile a collection of your information.

We were reminded to pay by credit card when buying on line or use Pay Pal. Basically we were reminded that we are vulnerable and should make every effort to give ourselves every opportunity to gain repayment even if we make silly decisions. As Rosemary said "Always be Suspicious"

Rosemary completed her talk by reminding her audience of the details of Pension Credit and Attendance Allowance and suggested that if you feel that you should be entitled to additional benefits you should contact the Citizens Advice Bureau where they have fully trained people to advise you.

An interesting talk which reminded her audience to be careful and to check with Citizens Advice Bureau for assistance.

Laurie Marshall

BOOK REVIEW RECOMMENDATION

"Ultra-Processed People - Why Do We All Eat Stuff that isn't Food ... and Why Can't We Stop?" by Dr Chris van Tulleken

We have entered a new age of eating where most of our calories come from an entirely novel set of substances called Ultra-Processed Food which is industrially processed, designed and marketed to be addictive. But do we really know what it's doing to our bodies? Join Chris in his travels through the world of food science and a UPF diet. Find out why exercise and willpower can't save us, and what UPF is really doing to our bodies, our health, our weight, and the planet (hint: nothing good). For too long we've been told we just need to make different choices, when really we're living in a food environment that makes this nigh-on impossible. So, this is a book about our rights, i.e. the right to know what we eat, what it does to our bodies, and the right to good, affordable food.

If you've come across the twin brothers, Doctors Chris and Xand, from the radio programme "What's Up Doc" and children's t.v. series "Operation Ouch", then you'll know them as enthusiastic and generous imparters of knowledge on all things medical (they're both NHS hospital doctors), given in a user-friendly and humorous style. This book is available in large print from the library and, with chapter headings such as "Wait, I'm Eating What?", and "Oh, So This is Why I'm Anxious and My Belly Aches!" (with sub-headings like "UPF is pre-chewed, smells funny and tastes odd"), and "What the Hell Am I Supposed to Do Then?", it's all very readable and easy to understand. So, a real wake-up call if ever there was one, and not just for our children and grandchildren, but for everyone.

In a rather telling paragraph towards the end of the book, he writes "*Being an NHS doctor is a privilege, and the people I learn the most from are my patients who have taught me that what we eat is much more about our environment than our desires. The NHS is one of the last bulwarks against the commercial forces that are now the leading cause of early death on our planet. If we privatise healthcare and allow it to operate with the same set of incentives as the food and tobacco companies, we will lose something that can never be rebuilt. This is a real and urgent risk.*" In his acknowledgements at the back of the book, Chris thanks many and varied friends and other medical professionals but, with his trademark humour, he writes "*My two daughters are the only people in these acknowledgements who have taken no interest whatsoever in this book. They are both avid consumers of UPF and, aside from being unsurprisingly willing participants in many eating trials, their contribution has been exclusively negative*".

Stella Chamberlin

Lound Lakes Nature Reserve

The Watching Wildlife Group recently spread its wings, and visited Lound Lakes near Lowestoft, where they had a very interesting guided tour. This was led by the warden, Andy, who explained the history and habitat management of the reserve.

Lound Lakes is owned by Essex and Suffolk water Authority but managed by Suffolk Wildlife Trust.

Although there is a team of volunteers involved with the site, we learnt that much of the centre is left to its own devices. The grass is naturally eaten by rabbits and hares, brambles grow abundantly to attract less common butterfly species, such as the white admiral, and fallen trees are left in situ to encourage insects. Ancient ponds are home to frogs, toads and great crested newts and wildflowers self-seed throughout the site. Much of the reserve is not accessible to the public and hence this encourages a multitude of spotted orchids and other rare wildflowers to grow without interruption.

During the visit we were lucky enough to see buzzards flying overhead and Andy made us aware of the sounds of kestrel chicks and woodpeckers as well as the well-known woodland birds. We were also able to get a close look at a cockchafer, commonly known as a may bug.

One of the most important tasks for the centre is to ring newly born bird chicks for the British Trust of Ornithology so they can be tracked during migration. This is carried out by professional bird ringers with support from science students at the UEA. They also do the same for the bat population, many of which reside in the old silver birch trees in the woodlands.

The visit was certainly an education in how much time and effort is spent in protecting and conserving the wildlife of Suffolk, so that future generations will still be able to enjoy our vast array of birds, insects, mammals and wildflowers for years to come.

Thank you Angela for organising this very interesting visit.

Jan Butler

Photos by Bob Butler



Common Blue



Cockchafer beetle



English Poppy

Subscriptions are due on June 1st for the 2026-2027 membership. The subscription will remain at £10 for the year 2026-2027. If you have joined Blackbourne U3A since 1st April 2026 then please note that your current subscription covers you for the 2026-2027 membership.

If you do not already pay by Standing Order, we prefer a BACS payment to the following bank account:

Bank: Santander

Account Name: Blackbourne U3A

Sort code: 090155

Account Number: 96935188

Reference - your name (surname and forename)

For those members who are unable to pay by BACS or Standing Order and prefer to pay by cheque or cash, Paul, our Treasurer will be on hand at New Green Centre to take your subscription at the next U3A talk on the 1st June 2026. Alternatively, you can send a cheque to me, the Membership Secretary, at my address below, but please do not post cash. If a payment in cash is your only option and you cannot come to the meeting on 1st June, please arrange for someone else to make the payment to Paul at the meeting on your behalf. If that is not possible then please email me and we'll try to sort something out.

Please double check you have not set up a Standing Order before you pay, because in the past we had some duplicate payments.

If for any reason you do not wish to rejoin, please inform me by emailing membershipsecretary@blackbourne-u3a.org.uk

Again please quote your membership number and remember to cancel any standing order payment by contacting your bank yourself as we are unable to cancel a standing order for you.

Melanie Grant Membership Secretary.
Greenways,
Pakenham Road,
Great Barton,
Bury St Edmunds, IP312PD

Apart from the lecture reports regularly provided by Mary, Paul and Laurie I receive very little copy or pictures from Interest Groups to give members, especially new members, an insight to their activities. The loss of Theatre and Garden Visits plus Educational visits adds to the paucity of content. Perhaps group leaders could persuade a participant to write just a few lines about one of their meetings?

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