

FEBRUARY 2026 NEWSLETTER

A belated Happy New Year to all our members and we hope that you continue to enjoy your membership of Rayleigh u3a. That brings me nicely to remind you that it is now Membership Renewal time and details are in the Newsletter.

We would be very grateful if you could do so online as it makes the process much easier - just remember to check you are paying it to the correct account! If you have signed up for Gift Aid, please do see the small article in the Newsletter about eligibility. As always, a Membership table will be ready at the February and March Members Meetings for us to take cheques if this is your preferred option.

RAYLEIGH u3a CHRISTMAS LUNCH

73 of our members enjoyed our wonderful Christmas Lunch at Saxon Hall early in December. The food, as always, was very tasty and the atmosphere was very convivial, with lots of chatting and laughing. We had a Christmas Quiz with prizes for the winning tables, as well as table games and a draw for each of the lovely Christmas table plants.



**Thank you to all the contributors to this edition of the Newsletter — do keep your articles and photos coming by email to: debbiebamber@rayleighu3a.co.uk.
Closing date for the April 2026 Newsletter is 15th March 2026**

FUTURE MONTHLY SPEAKERS

4th February 2026



Our speaker for February will be David Williams, talks about the mysteries of the Thames Estuary including Mud Flats, Artillery Ranges and Thames Barges. He has been a journalist, a sportswriter and a producer of short documentary films. Now he is a City of London Guide and Lecturer

4th March 2026

Many of you will remember Tony Harris entertaining us previously and now he returns as Margaret Thatcher. Look forward to an entertaining and hilarious afternoon. Love her or hate her you could never ignore her. This talk will bring back all the memories.



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Monthly Members Meetings at Mill Hall

Doors open at 1.45pm, Speaker starts at 2.30pm & will end around 3.30pm

Wednesday 4th February 2026

Wednesday 4th March 2026

Wednesday 1st April 2026

Wednesday 6th May 2026 - AGM

Theatre Trips, Educational and Social Events

Sunday 22nd February 2026 - Theatre/Social Trip to see **The Glenn Miller Orchestra** at the Cliffs Pavilion at 2.30pm

Tickets £33.50 - Tickets all sold but you can go on the waiting list.

Thursday 12th March 2026 - Talk for All at the Mill Hall 2pm
Edward Gildea - My Circumnavigation and How it turned me Green

Tickets £3.00 includes tea/coffee. On Sale at Feb & March Meetings

Saturday 21st March 2026 - Spring Quiz at Holy Trinity Church Hall
7pm—10 pm - Tickets: £6 per member. On sale at the February and March Meeting

Theatre Trips (all at the Cliffs Pavilion) — see details in Newsletter

28th May - **Ballad of Johnny & June**

2nd July - **Barnum**

29th July - **High Society**

PLEASE DO READ THIS!

I know it must feel like we are always asking for your help, but we are in a very tenuous situation as if we cannot find a replacement for our Secretary Jane, whose extended term of office **must** finish at the May AGM, we may not be able to continue.

As a registered Charity, we must have our Officers in place (our Chairman, Vice-Chair, Secretary and Treasurer) to be able to operate to our Constitution.

We know how much everyone enjoys the various aspects of our u3a - whether it be the monthly meetings, the groups, the events or all of them and the friendships it brings and we would be devastated not to be able to continue.

The Secretary role is vital for the smooth running of the u3a and needs someone with a little time to be able to devote to it but having done the role myself, it is not a very onerous task and we have lots of notes to help and lots of support to give.

- The main requirement would be to be computer literate (Word mainly) and to be able to attend Committee Meetings on 2nd Friday of the month between 10am to 12 noon and be able to get to most of the Members Meetings. Jane books our meeting rooms and completes our Annual returns to the Trust.

Please do give it some thought to see if you can rescue us! Jane is always available for a chat to find out more about the role, or do speak to Ray Osborne, our Chairman or myself.

We also need someone to take over the role of Groups Coordinator—see more details in Paul's editorial piece later in the newsletter.

BOOK STALL

After many years of doing the very popular book stall at our meetings, Les and Carol Shrubsole and Stella Lutterloch are 'retiring' and we owe them a huge amount of appreciation for their support and hard work over the years.

To be able to continue with this, **we are looking for a team of members** to be able to take a cabin sized suitcase of books to and from the meetings, as well as a couple of members to man the stall each month. Having a team of members bringing the books makes it much easier to cope with and we would be looking for 6 or more members to help with this.

If you may be able to help, please email amandajlowe@rayleighu3a.co.uk or speak to a Committee Member at the next meeting.

ADVANCE NOTICE OF AGM

**The Nineteenth Annual General Meeting of the
Rayleigh u3a
will take place on Wednesday 6th May 2026.
At The Mill Hall, Rayleigh
commencing at 2.00pm
followed by our Speaker at 2.30pm**

A copy of the Draft Minutes of the AGM 2025 and Draft Accounts will be displayed on the noticeboard at the March & April Meetings, will be emailed to members and will also be available to view on the Rayleigh u3a website.

We have vacancies for a Secretary and Groups Coordinator.

● For more information, please contact the Secretary, Jane Reeve

● Nomination Forms (available at the March & April Meetings, on the website and will be emailed) must be returned to the Secretary, by
● Wednesday 1st April 2026

Any motions which you would like to raise at the AGM, will need a Proposer and Seconder, and should also be submitted to the Secretary by 1st April 2026.

Jane can be contacted on 07931 584140 or janereeve@rayleighu3a.co.uk

GIFT AID

Just a reminder to those members who have completed Gift Aid Forms - to be eligible for us to claim back the 25% from HMRC for your membership, you must make the payment from **your own personal bank account or your joint account**. Unfortunately last year we had to reject some claims as their fees had been paid from someone else's (usually their partners) bank account so were not eligible. Your co operation would be greatly appreciated.

For members who have not completed a Gift Aid form, we would encourage you to do so as it is a valuable source of income for us. To be eligible you need to pay UK Income tax and complete a form which can be found on the website, or copies are always available on the Membership desk. We claim the money back annually from HMRC so there is nothing more for you to do. Many thanks!

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL 2026 – 2027

Note: For renewals, no applications forms are needed. If, however, your personal details have changed i.e. address, phone number, email address etc, please notify Debbie Bamber by phone or email – details below.

Membership fee = £20 (Associate Fee = £16.50) must be paid no later than 31st March 2026

Payment options:

Payment by Standing Order – Complete a Standing Order form and hand it in to your bank or if you use internet banking, you can set it up yourself using the details below.

Payment by Bank Transfer – using the details below:

Account Name:	Rayleigh University of the Third Age
Sort Code:	54 – 30 – 60
Account Number:	42232678
Reference:	Your surname and postcode e.g. Smith SS6 1AB

Payment by Cheque – made payable to **Rayleigh u3a**.

Important: Please write your name, address and postcode on the back of the cheque.

Please hand your cheque in at the Monthly Meeting or send your cheque to:
Debbie Bamber, Membership Secretary
3 The Saltings,
Hadleigh, Benfleet, Essex SS7 2BD

Payment by Cash – If you are unable to use any of the options above, we will accept cash. Please place it in an envelope with your name and address clearly written on it.

If you have any queries regarding membership renewal, please do not hesitate to contact Debbie on **07947 064799** or email: **debbiebamber@rayleighu3a.co.uk**

A Standing Order form will be available for download from the Rayleigh u3a website.

By renewing my membership of Rayleigh u3a, I confirm that I will abide by the terms of membership as stated on the membership form when I joined. Also I consent to the holding of my membership records on a secure database for the administration of Rayleigh u3a in accordance with the published Rayleigh u3a data protection and privacy policy, which can be seen displayed on the Secretary's notice board at monthly meetings or the Rayleigh u3a website.

If you would like your Membership card sent to you, please send a stamped addressed envelope to Debbie Bamber (address above) who will post it to you once they have been printed.



Saturday 21st March 2026

**7.00—10.00pm at the Main Hall,
Holy Trinity Church, Rayleigh**

Come and join us for a light hearted Quiz Night with prizes for the winning team. Join a team and make new friends.

Bring your own drinks & nibbles - a paper & pen can be useful too....

FREE PRIZE DRAW

Tickets £6.00 - available at February & March Monthly Meetings

TALKS FOR ALL

Thursday 12th March 2026 - 2 to 4pm

**My Circumnavigation and how it turned me Green
by Edward Gildea**

Edward Gildea became a passionate Green activist following a Clipper Round the World Yacht Race. He saw how vast and mighty, but yet small and delicate our planet is and what a precarious environmental course we are on but how the planet can offer it's own solutions. His talk is illustrated with film clips, photos and poetry

Venue: The Mill Hall upstairs room (lift available)

Tickets: £3 per member to include tea or coffee (subsidised by Rayleigh u3a) and are available at the February & March Main Meetings

THEATRE TRIPS

- all at the Cliffs Pavilion

THE BALLAD OF JOHNNY & JUNE



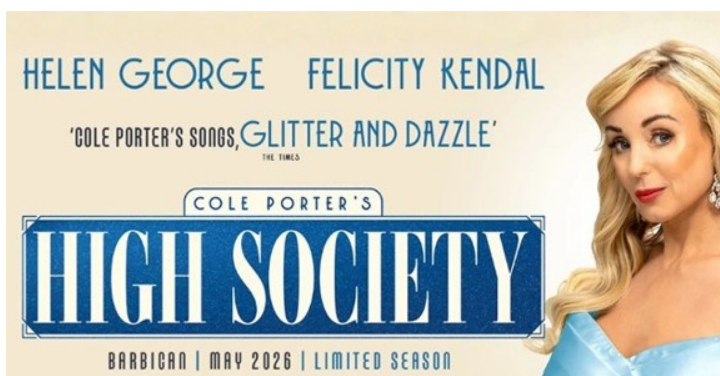
**Thursday 28th May
2026 at 2.30pm
Tickets: £42.75**

BARNUM

**Thursday 2nd July
2026 at 2.30pm
Tickets: £42.00**



HIGH SOCIETY



**Wednesday 29th
July 2026 at
2.30pm
Tickets: £39.00**

SIGN UP AT THE THEATRE TRIPS TABLE AT THE FEB & MARCH MAIN MONTHLY MEETINGS

NOTICES

Sadly we have been informed of the death of Claire Dawson who was a member for many years, who passed away peacefully in November 2025.

LATEST NEWS FROM OUR GROUPS COORDINATOR

We are continuing to increase the opportunities for our members to join new interest groups. We hope to start a couple of new Groups - the first being a Bridge group and the second will look to renovate Dolls Houses.

Dolls House renovation is an interesting subject and our member who will organise it has many years of knowledge and experience she is keen to share with you. As with any house renovation project, there are roles for both Ladies and Gentlemen - it is just that the work will be at a smaller scale!

We have two members already looking to join the Bridge group so with only two more, we can begin the group.

The second Rummikub Group which began meeting at Rayleigh Conservative Club premises last June still has some places available if you are interested in joining. **Please check elsewhere on our website for the most up-to-date list of other groups which presently have vacancies.**

If you are interested or would like more information about any of our groups, then please contact me via the Contacts page or come and see me at the Monthly Members Meetings.

I mentioned in the last Newsletter that I will be standing down from the Group Co-ordinator role at the next AGM in May 2026 and ask if any members would come forward to consider taking on the role so we can ensure a smooth handover.

Do please contact me even if you are only remotely interested and I can explain about the sort of things I get involved with.

Finally, a polite request...our Group Leaders do a fabulous job in organising the groups our members attend and would be very grateful to those in their groups if they would always let them know if you are going to attend each meeting OR NOT please.

Paul Reeve, Group Coordinator

NEWS FROM OUR GROUPS

Coffee & Conversation for Ladies 1 Group celebrate 2 years!

We were the first Coffee and Conversation for Ladies to get off the ground in 2023 with just 3 members and we are now a group of 7 and celebrated 2 years as a group withCoffee and cake!

We meet every 2 weeks in a cafe in town and talk about anything and everything - there is no subject or agenda but we never seem to run out of things to talk about! We are a very diverse group, but that makes it all the more interesting and we have become friends who support, encourage and look out for each other.



Barbara Whitehead

WALKING GROUP 5

Last minute change of plan for Walking Group 5 in November. Seemed too good an opportunity to miss, so we decided to walk the pier to see the poppies. So glad we did as it was a wonderful sight!

Sheila Loveridge



STROLLING GROUP 1

On a bright and breezy Thursday, eight members of Strolling Group 1 took the bus to Shoeburyness. Although we stopped for a coffee break at The Serendipity Café, the main purpose of our visit was to see the museum situated within the Cart and Wagon Shed. Although only small it is full of interest giving a fascinating and nostalgic insight to Shoebury's past and the opportunity to see artefacts and read stories that make vivid the history of Shoeburyness.

Following a bracing stroll along the seawall we arrived at the Beach House café. Not only did we enjoy a tasty lunch but we also enjoyed spectacular views of the Estuary as the tide came in. The display of the birds never ceases to amaze, unfortunately we lacked the knowledge (or eyesight) to identify all of them!



Jill Cann

WAFFLING FOR MEN

The Waffling for Men group had a busy 2025 full of activities which included Pétanque, Archery, Axe-Throwing, a day at the Cricket in Chelmsford and a tour and tasting at a local Brewery.

In November we once again returned to CJ's Bowling Alley in Hockley for some quite competitive Ten-Pin bowling.

Our list of things to do in the next 12+ months include the following and the list of suggestions continues to grow.

- ◆ RAF Museum, Hendon
- ◆ London Transport Museum, Covent Garden
- ◆ Brooklands Car and Aviation Museum, Weybridge
- ◆ Bank of England Museum / Level 54 viewing at 33 Bishopsgate, London
- ◆ Post Office Museum and Railway, London
- ◆ Footgolf at Barleylands
- ◆ Visit to a local vineyard and tasting
- ◆ Afternoon of racing (not us - the dogs!) at Romford Greyhound Stadium



Paul Reeve

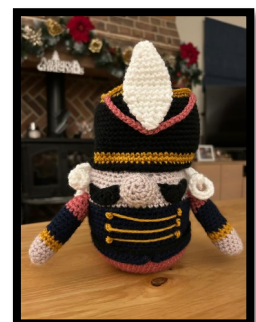
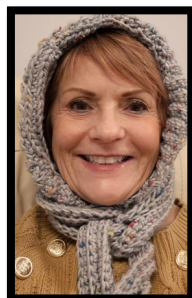
VISITING INTERESTING PLACES IN ESSEX

On a windy day on 20th October sixteen Members of Visiting Interesting Places Group met at The Pier to take the train down the Pier to visit the famous RNLI Lifeboat Station. This visit was organised by Maureen and Pete Huntly. Following the visit, we had an enjoyable lunch at Strawberry Fields.

Maureen Huntly



KNIT & CROCHET - latest creations!



GARDENING GROUP Members Visit Glow

11 members of the Gardening Group visited the 360 acre RHS Hyde Hall on a very chilly evening at the end of November to see the world of magical winter wonders that is Glow. An enchanting garden that came alive with dazzling colour and twinkling lights including an iconic sycamore sculpture, we walked through the Australian and New Zealand Garden where glittering snowballs float amongst the trees creating a frosty sparking scene.

We continued through the Queen Mother's Garden and into Robinson Garden where the mycelium glowed with 2,500 shimmering fibers. There was a display of lights dancing on the lake and a glittering tunnel of lights into the Winter Garden with striking willow sculptures. Despite the temperature being -2 degrees, it was a magical experience.

Val Whitehouse



LONGER WALKS GROUP

We were short of walkers in October, so decided just to do a local walk through Hockley Woods, Gusted Woods, Cherry Orchard and Grove Woods. We were shocked to discover the lack of water in the lake at Cherry Orchard! The fish were really struggling (they were all rescued and looked after at a later date).

In November we started and finished our walk at the Halfway House on the A127. Our walk took us into Thorndon Country Park North and South, Herongate and Ingrave. We had a quick look around the outside of St Nicolas' Church in Ingrave, built in 1734 by Lord Petre, a big landowner in the area, also associated with Ingatestone Hall. Then a quick coffee stop at the Essex Wildlife Trust cafe in the County Park North, before returning to the Halfway House for lunch.

Peter Dixon



SERENDIPITY 6 visit the Dogs Trust

It was a very interesting visit showing how this charitable organisation operates and how the rehoming program offers a structured and compassionate approach to finding the perfect match for the prospective owner and a dog looking for a new start in life.

The Basildon Dogs Trust opened in 2014, and their site is in 12 acres of land and has 60 glass fronted kennels. They can accommodate up to 120 dogs but average around 90. The facilities include a training barn, veterinary and surgical suites and a dedicated training and rehabilitation unit as well as a hydrotherapy pool to enrich the lives of the dogs in their care.

In 2024 the Basildon Dogs Trust helped 586 dogs find loving homes! The average length of stay for a dog is 61.5 days. The Dogs Trust is the UK's largest dog welfare charity, dedicated to ensuring that every dog has the chance to find a loving forever home, they focus on rehoming dogs of all shapes and sizes. Their mission is to provide a safe haven for dogs in their care while promoting responsible pet ownership and the importance of adopting rather than buying. They receive no government funding, relying on donations and bequests. It costs £64.06 per dog per day in the kennels and £32.46 per day for a dog in foster care as all the costs are covered by the Trust.

The Dogs Trust was established over 125 years ago and has grown to become a leading authority on canine welfare. Dogs Trust Basildon boasts a diverse array of dogs available for adoption, ranging from playful puppies to wise older companions. Each dog has its unique story and personality, ensuring that potential adopters can find a match that suits their lifestyle.

Val Whitehouse



Members of the GARDENING GROUP enjoyed a Festive Lunch at The Camelia.



SERENDIPITY 5

On a cold wet and blustery day in October, an intrepid group from Serendipity 5 set forth on their monthly adventure. Our destination was to the sky garden in the Walki Talki building at number 2 Fenchurch Street. The rapid ascent to floor 27 left us stunned by the views across London. The garden covers three more floors and includes many exotic trees and plants, from Bananas to tall ferns.

The building is situated adjacent to the Thames and give birds eye views of the Tower of London, HMS Belfast and beyond. Walking round the stepped garden floors gives you 360 degree spectacular views of the whole of London. We were told that on a clear day you can see the arch of Wembley stadium, but not today .



After lunch our next stop was the Hunterian Museum, the home of the Royal College of Surgeons. This is a macabre museum displaying the history of surgery through the ages.

John Hunter was born near East Kilbride in 1728. At the age of twenty-one Hunter arrived in London to assist his brother William, who was a respected teacher of anatomy; soon, John was running the dissection classes

himself it's been suggested that the Hunters were burking bodies for their school, Hunter joined the British Army as a surgeon in 1760, and four years later established his own anatomy school in London. In 1767 he was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society, and in 1776 he was appointed as a surgeon to King George III. Hunter died of a heart attack at the age of sixty-five, He was firstly buried at St Martin-in-the-Fields, but in 1859 was reinterred at Westminster Abbey.

Over his life John Hunter amassed a collection of over fourteen-thousand preparations of human, animal and plant specimens, which he displayed at his home as a teaching museum. In 1799, following Hunter's death, the British government purchased his collection of papers and specimens for £15,000 (around £700,000 today) and presented them to the Company of Surgeons – which would later become the Royal College of Surgeons, based on the south side of Lincoln's Inn Fields.



In 2023, the Hunterian Museum reopened its doors following its £4.6m refurbishment. Of the seventy-thousand objects in the Hunterian collection, two-thousand are on display within the museum. Exhibits include teeth belonging to soldiers at the Battle of Waterloo, two-headed skulls, fetuses both human and animal, Winston Churchill's dentures, Joseph Lister's scientific apparatus. The final object on display is the human heart of a transplant recipient named Jennifer Sutton – who was recipient named Jennifer Sutton – who was alive and well and in attendance at the 2023 museum relaunch.

Bob White

LONGER WALKS GROUP

For our December walk we went off to London, a walk led by Paul Reeve. We started at Island Gardens, and then walked through the Greenwich Tunnel to the south bank by the Cutty Sark. We then headed west along the Thames Path, through Deptford, around the old naval dockyard, and on to Surrey Docks, which have now been refashioned as housing.

We had a pit stop at the Surrey Docks City Farm before continuing our journey along the Thames Path. We next stopped at the historic Mayflower pub in Rotherhithe, which is located near to the landing steps where the Pilgrim Fathers left the UK for the New World in 1620. Our walk continued on to London Bridge, where we went our separate ways, some heading home, and some heading into the West End to look at the Christmas lights. Paul provided lots of interesting facts along the route. Thank you Paul for a very informative walk.

Peter Dixon



SERENDIPITY 6 and VIPE GROUPS enjoyed a festive lunch at The Bellhouse



CREATIVE WRITING GROUP

A short story by Barbara Bowen.

The New Flat

Joyce looked around her new flat and sighed. It was small, 'compact' her daughter called it. But it was light and modern and suitably equipped for the 'older person'. The living room contained the new sofa and matching upright chair, her previous three-piece suite had been much too big. Her large oak dining table also had to go and in its place stood a small IKEA table and chair set. So no more large family meals at her house although when Joyce thought about it she realised that it had been years since she had the whole family over for a sit down meal; it had become such hard work and so difficult to get them all together.

Joyce didn't quite know what to do next. Her daughter and son-in-law had been helping with the move over the last few days. Her daughter, Sarah, had just left after unloading the last of the packing boxes and putting things away. She loved her family dearly and was pleased that she now lived in the same town as her daughter. It was Sarah that had been persuasive about Joyce moving nearer to them and helpful in finding the smart ground-floor flat. Joyce had been increasingly finding the stairs in her previous house more difficult. Her son, Matthew, had hired and drove the moving van helping to unload the furniture; the new move meant that Joyce was also nearer to Matthew and his family.

So why did Joyce feel sad and lost and slightly panicky? She decided to make a cup of tea and walked the few steps into the well-equipped kitchen. She tried to remember which cupboards the cups were in and where were the spoons? Joyce opened one drawer but it held a carving knife and fork and other kitchen utensils. Of course, it was the top drawer that held the cutlery including the spoons. After making her tea she sat in her new chair; she felt very strange as if she was in someone else's home, everything seemed unreal.

While resting and sipping the tea, Joyce saw her memory box lying on the side table. 'I'll have a look through that as I'm sitting here' she thought.

Over the years Joyce had collected personal keepsakes, items that were special to her. She hadn't opened her box for a long time and it was with mixed feelings that she looked through the contents. She found the photograph album with black and white photos of her and John with their young family. Joyce felt pleasure mixed with sadness as she looked at the photos. John had died, the children were adults with children of their own and she was old – where had the time gone?

As she replaced the album a single photo fell out with a piece of silk attached by a small pin. It was a photo of Matthew, her and John's first child, on his christening day. She remembered how quiet and content Matthew had been until the priest poured water on his head – how he cried then!

(continued on next page)

And the piece of white silk, 'oh yes' Joyce remembered, this was from Matthew's beautiful christening gown that her mother had made. Not many male babies wear a long christening dress nowadays she thought; and Joyce had used it again when Sarah had come along a couple of years later.

Joyce continued looking through her mementoes, the silver 'bride and groom' cake decoration that was on her wedding cake, the fabric pink flower that was part of her hair comb when she wore her hair up in curls for her wedding day; the letters the children had written from their very first school holidays away from home. At the bottom of the box she felt something soft; pulling it out she saw that it was a yellow baby's mitten. It was part of a pair that she had knitted before their first baby was born. She had kept it because the mitten was the first thing she had ever knitted for her babies and at the time she felt quite proud of herself. She had chosen yellow wool so the mittens could be used whether the baby was a boy or a girl. In those days there was no way of knowing the gender of the baby even if you wanted to.

The keepsakes brought back memories of so long ago and yet were all so clear in her mind; Joyce felt just the same person as she was then, it was as if everything else had changed.

Suddenly the phone rang startling Joyce from her memories. She had to think for a minute where the noise was coming from and where she had put the phone. Hesitantly she picked up the phone and was delighted to hear it was her son **and** to hear the terrific news he had. Matthew excitedly told her that his son Neil and wife Clare, were going to have their first baby and went on to say how he couldn't quite believe that he was going to be a grandfather and that she would now be a great grandmother! Matthew asked if he could come and collect her at the weekend for a family celebration of the good news. He joked that great grandma would now have to start knitting again.

After the call Joyce felt excited – what news! A new baby in the family. And so life goes on, she thought, as one part of your life changes another begins. She would cherish her memories but look forward to the new experiences and challenges ahead and, of course to the new great grandchild!

FINAL PLEA

What a bumper newsletter this month! So many groups and wonderful experiences you all have had.

We really need your help to keep this continuing - please do come forward to find out more about the Secretary or Group Coordinator roles, or to add your name to the list of helpers for the Book Stall

Your u3a Needs You!