Issue 129

RAYLEIGH u3a learn, laugh, live

NOVEMBER 2026 NEWSLETTER

Welcome to our latest u3a newsletter and a big welcome to all new members.

At last we have some rain for our gardens! Who would have thought we would be looking forward to some wet and windy weather? It does feel like autumn now with the evenings drawing in. A perfect time to sit in your comfy chair with a nice hot drink and enjoy this newsletter which is full of articles from our members.

There is still time to join us for our Annual Christmas Lunch – details inside and tickets can be bought at the November meeting. We also have a new event – An Afternoon with Elvis – which we are holding in conjunction with Rayleigh Grange u3a. The afternoon is arranged and hosted by the organisers which means you can invite friends and family along too if you like. You can put your name down at the meeting and payment will be due in January.

Our Meet and Greet Sessions have been very popular so we have decided to continue them into 2027 so watch out for dates to pop in your diary. They are proving very successful for members to make new friends and reacquaint with old ones!

We held an event for all our Volunteers on 21st October as a little gesture to thank them for all their support they give to our u3a. Do you know that we have over 80 Group Leaders and Volunteers? They make up a fifth of our membership and they provide our members with exciting opportunities with their groups; with a welcome when you arrive at meetings or are a prospective new member; on the Committee to keep the u3a up and running; making refreshments and help manning our tables, selling tickets for example. I'm sure you would like to thank them all too! We are always looking for extra help so do speak to us at a meeting if you would like to find out more.

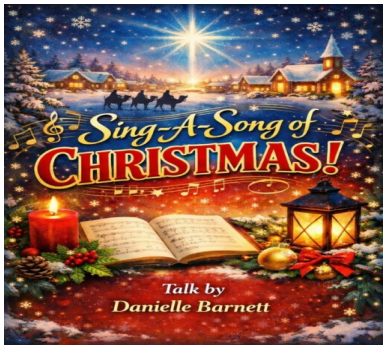
Have a lovely festive period and look forward to seeing you all in 2027!
Best wishes,
Debbie Bamber, Newsletter Editor

NOTICES

Sadly we have been informed of the death of Peter Shelford who passed away on 28th September 2026. Our condolences have been sent to his wife Beryl, and family.

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 February 2027 Newsletter is 15th January 2027

FUTURE MONTHLY SPEAKERS



4th November 2026

Our speaker for November will be Danielle Barnett who is returning with a festive talk entitled 'Sing-a-Song of Christmas!' Do you know why some of the best known Christmas songs that are played in shopping malls, churches and at parties were created? Danielle tells us all.

6th January 2027

Our speaker for January will be Martin Orkin with his music talk on "The Beatles Story, Part 1 – Beatlemania!" He will be discussing the early years of The Beatles and how they became famous and will be playing snippets of some of their greatest hits.



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 November 2026

****No Meeting in December****

Wednesday 6th January 2027

Wednesday 3rd February 2027

Meet & Greet Coffee Events for All Members @ WI Hall

Friday 20th November 2026 10.30am - 12.30pm

Friday 11th December 2026 2pm – 4pm – with mince pies!

Theatre Trips, Educational and Social Events

Tuesday 1st December 2026—Rayleigh u3a Annual Christmas Lunch

12.30pm at Saxon Hall. Tickets on sale now - £39 each

Thursday 11th March 2027 – Rayleigh Dementia Friends Talk/Session at The Mill Hall - 2.00pm – 3.30pm – Tickets available from January 2027

Friday 19th March 2027 – An Afternoon with Elvis @ The Mill Hall.

Door open at 1.30pm for a 2pm start. Tickets on sale now - £15 each

Thursday 29th April 2027 - Theatre Trip to see **Jesus Christ Superstar** at the Cliffs Pavilion at 2.30pm. Tickets on sale now - £58.00

Thursday 13th May 2027 - Theatre Trip to see **Jersey Boys** at the Cliffs Pavilion at 2.30pm. Tickets on sale now - £40.80



ANNUAL U3A CHRISTMAS LUNCH

Tuesday 1st December @ 12.30pm

Saxon Hall

Tickets: £39 - on sale now

STARTERS

Spiced Carrot & Parsnip Soup Breaded Brie with a Plum & Port Compote or

Prawn Cocktail with Smoked Salmon

MAINS

Traditional Roast Turkey with Roast Potatoes, Cranberry Stuffing, Pigs in Blankets and Fresh Festive Vegetables or

Grilled Sea Bass with Buttered Asparagus, Roasted New Potatoes and a White Wine Sauce or

Butternut Squash, Spinach, Leek and Goats Cheese Filo Parcel with Ratatouille & Roasted New Potatoes

DESSERTS

Christmas Pudding served with Brandy Sauce

Baileys Creme Brulee served with a Shortbread Biscuit

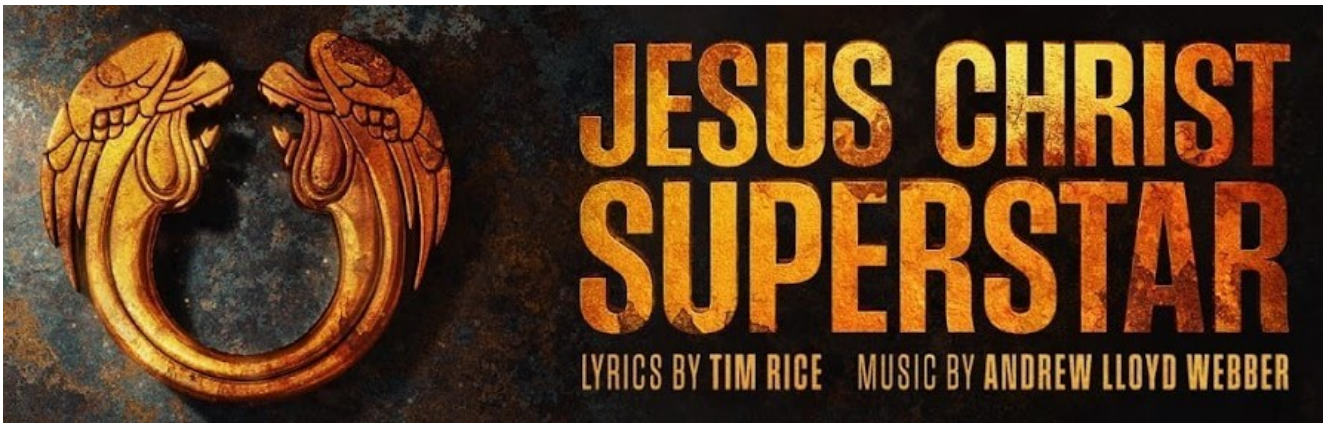
White Chocolate & Raspberry Cheesecake

Followed by Tea or Coffee & Mince Pies

Please email debbiebamber@rayleighu3a.co.uk for a ticket or book at the November Members Meeting

THEATRE TRIPS

at the Cliffs Pavilion

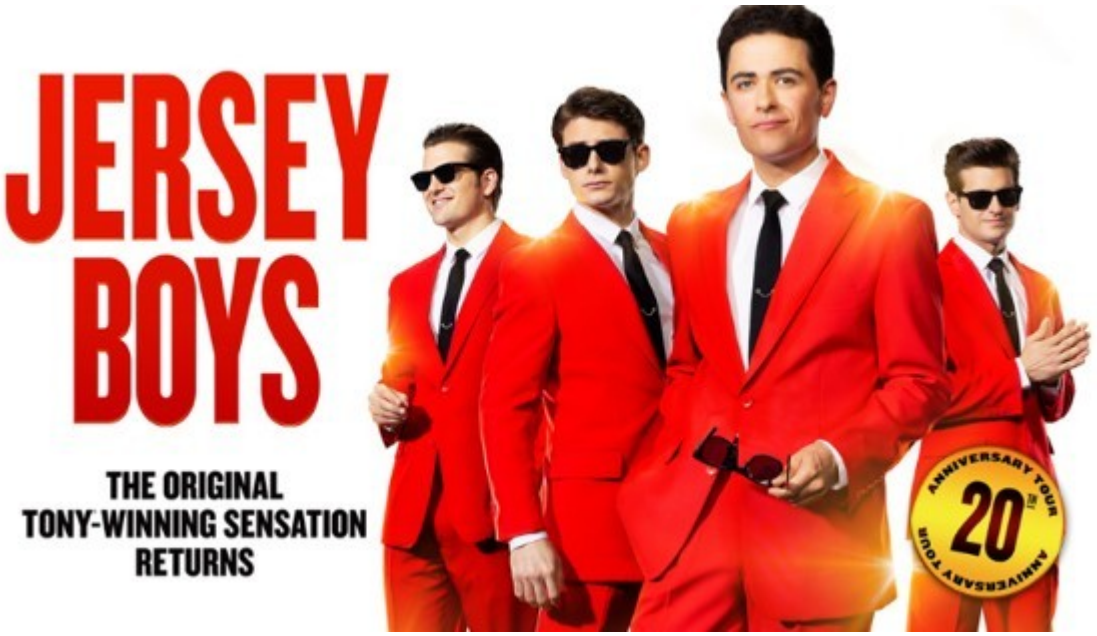


Featuring: Sam Ryder

Thursday 29th April 2027 at 2.30pm

Tickets: £58.00 on sale at Nov & Jan Meetings

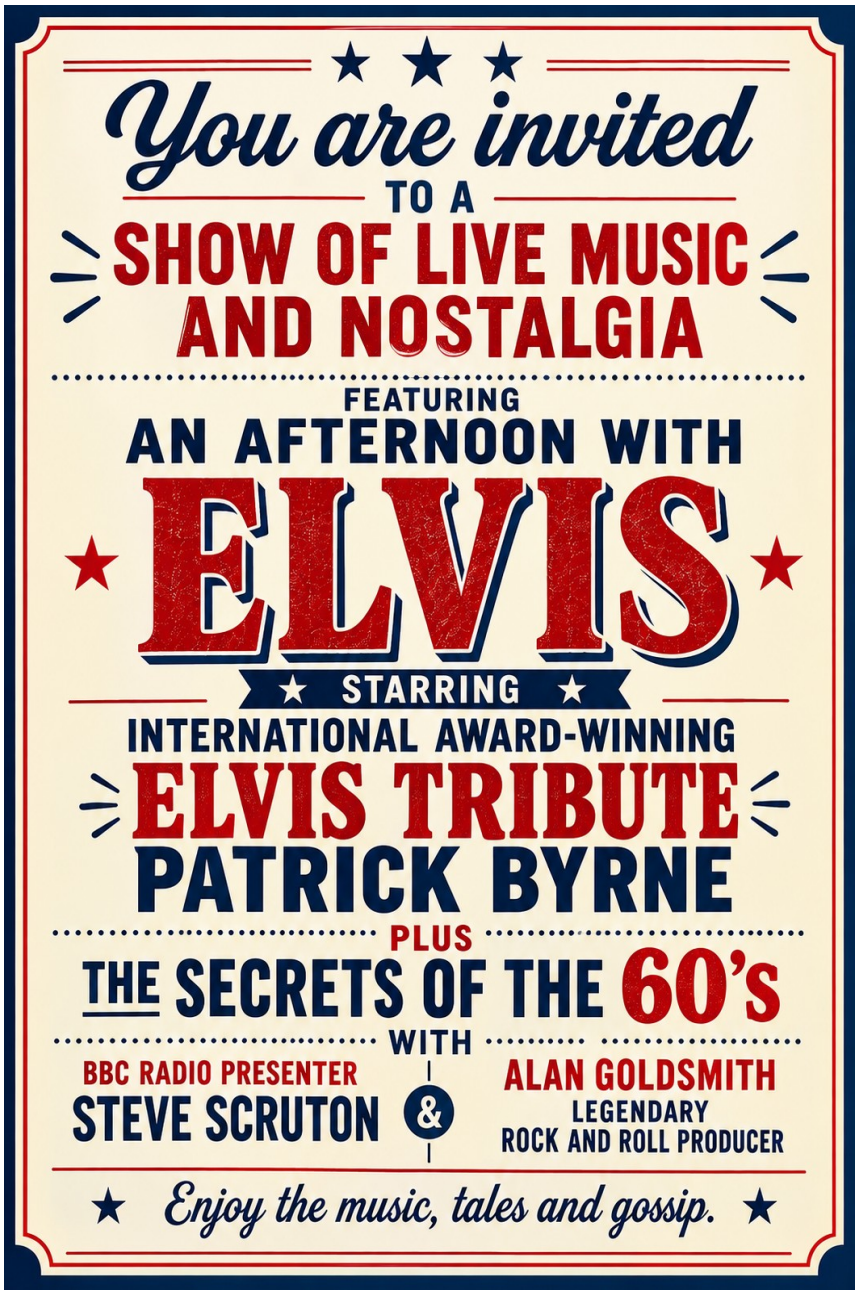
Or email: debbiebamber@rayleighu3a.co.uk



Thursday 13th May 2027 at 2.30pm

Tickets: £40.80 on sale at Nov & Jan Meetings

Or email: debbiebamber@rayleighu3a.co.uk



Friday 19th March 2027 @ The Mill Hall

Doors open at 1.30pm for a 2pm start

Tickets: £15 payable in January

An Afternoon with Elvis marks the 50th anniversary since his passing in 1977. This event, held in conjunction with Rayleigh Grange u3a, features all the big hits with top tribute act Patrick Byrne. It also includes, in the first half, showbiz chat and tales from Alan and Steve. Alan will be talking about all the big names he's worked with and promoted from the 60s to today, and Steve will spill the beans on some of the 20,000 plus guests he's interviewed during 50 years on the radio, 38 of those years on the BBC.

POSTAGE STAMPS

I would like to thank everyone who has donated their used postage stamps. I have received so many that I can now send them off. I have been asked if I could send them to :-

GUIDE DOGS FOR THE BLIND

If you have a charity that you would like me to send the next batch of stamps to, please put a note in the collection basket. Please can I ask that when cutting used stamps from envelopes that there is border of at least 1cm, avoiding damage to perforations otherwise the charity can't use the stamps.

Thank you! Jill Cann.

****

SAVE THE DATE

Rayleigh u3a Rayleigh Dementia Friends Session/Talk

Presenter: Mr Mark Neville (The Alzheimer's Society)

Date: Thursday 11th March 2027 Time: 2pm – 3:30pm

Venue: Mill Hall Rayleigh

Tickets available from January.

As part of Rayleigh's Inclusive Dementia Community accreditation we are hosting an Alzheimer's Society 'Dementia Friends' session/talk, which provides an opportunity to find out more about dementia and for attendees to ask questions.

The talk is aimed at all, carers, people living with the early to mid-stages of dementia and anyone interested in knowing more about this disease. It will cover some of the key issues faced by people living with dementia, their loved ones and carers. The session will enable attendees to strengthen their knowledge and understanding of dementia. It will also include information on help and resources available to those affected and their families.

The talk will also provide an opportunity for questions and joint learning and to discuss the Essex "Inclusive Dementia Communities" approach to supporting people affected by dementia to live well in their community.

We held a similar event several years ago and members found it very informative and helpful and we would recommend it for anyone to learn more about the subject, whether or not you or someone close to you is affected by it.

LATEST NEWS FROM OUR GROUPS COORDINATOR

Hello Everyone!

Four more new groups have started in the last few weeks. The History idea displayed on my boards really took off and we now have two History Groups running with just one vacancy and Strolling too has been very popular with another two groups formed, only one of which has vacancies.

New ideas displayed recently include British Sign Language, Traditional Irish Music and Culture, Military History, Upwords (a more challenging form of Scrabble), Art History/Appreciation and Ancient Civilisations.

Groups actively looking for new members are both the Family History Groups, so if you are interested in tracing your family history, there are two lovely groups waiting to help you. Serendipity 6 are looking for new blood to join their group too. The Bridge Group is growing in number, meeting weekly currently, as they are all very studiously learning how to play the game.

Groups forming, but just don't quite have enough interest yet include Mah Jong and Board Games. Anyone interested in playing Chess or learning how to play the game, I do have a member ready to be a group leader.

I will also be advertising shortly on our Website the New Ideas and Groups forming, so please take a look. I will still advertise, as usual on my boards at the Main Meetings, at the Meet and Greet Sessions and in this Newsletter.

The Meet and Greet sessions are very popular, there are two more sessions booked for this year on the 20th November 10.30am to 12.30pm and the 11th December 2-4pm (with mince pies). We meet in the WI Hall in Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh. Tea/coffee/biscuits £1. Everyone is welcome to come along, no need to book and a warm, convivial welcome awaits. It's an ideal opportunity for new members to meet current members and for group leaders to speak to the members and for members to get to know the committee too. Stay tuned for more dates to come in 2027!!

If you have any ideas for new groups, please speak to me at any of the meetings or contact me via groupscoordinator@rayleighu3a.co.uk

Regards to you all and thank you for your support.

Barbara

Groups Coordinator

NEWS FROM OUR GROUPS

Strolling Group 4

Strolling Group 4 had their inaugural stroll on a bleak, rather blustery Autumn Tuesday morning when we braved a stroll along Southend pier. We had an enjoyable and well deserved coffee and hot chocolate break at the end of the pier before braving the walk back. A stroll which certainly blew away the cobwebs and very nearly a few of us!

We then relaxed at the Sands Restaurant where the photograph was taken, with a 'bride and groom' in the background! Here's to many more such enjoyable strolls in the future.

Group Leader:
Maria Coulson



Book Group 4

Book Groups work in different ways but their common feature is that they comprise individuals united by their love of reading. Our group, Book Group 4, meets in the afternoon of the fourth Monday of the month at Rayleigh Library. We are ably assisted by Librarian Kerry Bell who has the unenviable task of trawling Essex Library's many branches to assemble each month enough books for the group. Of course, this means that we never know what's next and so we find ourselves reading and often enjoying books that we might never have chosen.

Last month we read Beautiful Ugly a mystery thriller by Alice Feeney that, according to one review, takes readers into a world that is charming on the surface but with danger, hatred and revenge lurking just beneath. Opinions amongst the group were divided, some finding it a chilling read while others were less convinced.

We are currently reading The Nightingale by Kristin Hannah: the book is set in a small town in France that is occupied by the Nazis after the fall of France in WW2. The book shows the affect of occupation on the town's inhabitants, the choices they are forced to make and how war brutalises. On a lighter note, reading the book has taught me the French for nightingale (but whether I remember it in weeks to come is another thing).

Our group has room for two more members. If like us you enjoy reading why not get in touch with Barbara Whitehead, the Group Co-ordinator, and come and join us.

Jeff Bowen, Group Leader

VIPE Visit the Essex Records Office

On Thursday 30th July I organised a trip to Essex Records Office (ERO) in Chelmsford where we were greeted wholeheartedly by Niel Wiffin, veteran Archive Assistant and Events Lead. His enthusiasm filtered around the room capturing our interest and quest for what was to come. He could have made the most boring subject interesting. It's a public building and with prior arrangement anyone would be welcome to carry out research.

The employees' and volunteers' knowledge is immeasurable which they would be available to willingly share with the researcher. We were introduced into the Search Room where computer, microfiche records, audio, hard copies, old books and manuscripts and so on could be accessed for research purposes. It was in the Search Room that a table had been pre-covered in old maps of Rayleigh, in anticipation of our visit and captured our interest, provoking avid conversation.

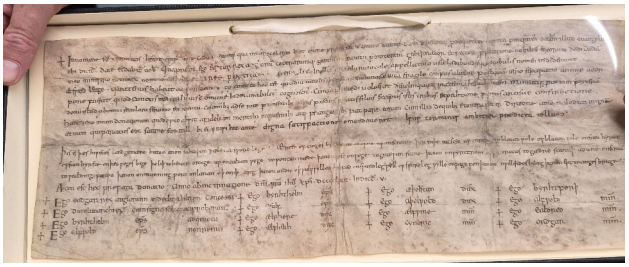
We were taken further into the depths of the secure building where ancient artifacts were stored within the 8-9 miles of cabinets in the fireproof, atmospheric controlled conditions. Here we were shown irreplaceable, invaluable items including an Elizabethan map from Ingatestone Hall exemplifying the depth of vibrant detail, defying its age; an old bible dating from 1629, namely the "Broomfield Bible" featuring a delicate embroidered cover with the Royal arms which belonged to Charles 1st and the oldest document dated from 962 AD during the reign of King Edgar and despite its clarity, the untrained eye struggled to read.

We left this room by the timed door (allowing us only a few minutes to escape) venturing on to the conservation department. The room reminded me of an old school science lab with non-chemical intervention used to enable the restoration of artifacts, such as rebinding, cleaning the parchment and much more. There is usually only one member of staff supported by volunteers who magically re-create and restore the assortment of antiquities, preserving their life for prosperity.

The tour lasted two hours, although a few more hours could easily have been absorbed by Neil's captivating zest and passion, but alas lunch was calling, so our day concluded with a satisfying meal at a nearby venue.

Christine Bell



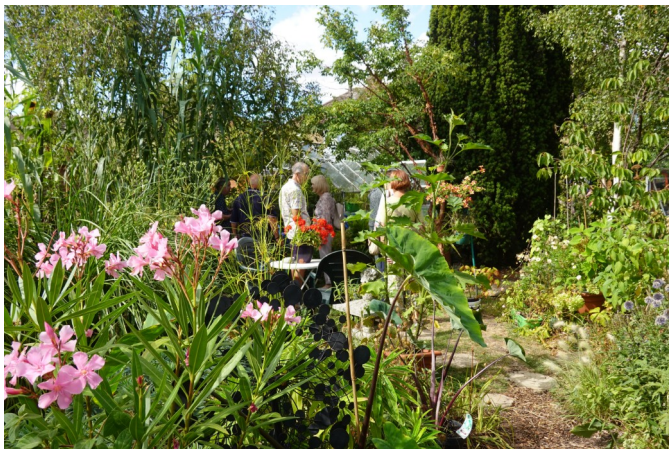




A Suburban Jungle of a Garden

Finding gardens to visit after such a hot and dry summer is always difficult so when the Gardening Group went to Cedar Avenue in Wickford we were a little unsure of what to expect from this garden, which was described as a large town garden. We were amazed at what we discovered!

The front garden we were informed is never watered but was full of fully grown plants all surviving in this heat wave of a summer including a magnificent Russian Sage (Perovskia 'blue spire'). The 120ft back garden was a real delight and an amazing 'suburban jungle' full of the widest range of plants we have seen, shrubs, grasses and perennials and some 100+ pots which the owners Chris and Michael lovingly care for.



During a stroll down the two paths, we discovered a wildlife area and pond and four packed greenhouses amongst many trees and hostas, carnivorous plants, tropical style plants, any of which we did not know the name of was explained to us by the two owners. It was such an unusual garden and one that kept surprising us.

A sit down for tea, coffee and cake and a chat with Chris and Michael and a visit from Merlin the cat completed a really enjoyable visit.

Val Whitehouse

Visiting Interesting Places in Essex

Twelve members of the VIPE group visited Greensted Church on Monday 17th August, 2026. We met for refreshments at The Green Man pub before heading off to meet up with Anne the Church Warden at this beautiful church.

Greensted Church is the oldest wooden church in the world, and the oldest wooden building in Europe. The nave walls are Saxon and were probably erected about 1060 A.D. The oldest grave is the shield shaped one on the south side of the church believed to be final resting place of a bowman who had been on one of the twelfth century crusades.



The tour of the church and grounds were so interesting and many of us also enjoyed purchasing some of the homemade jams and chutneys which were on sale inside the church.

We then went back to The Green Man for a very enjoyable lunch.

Tracy Symons

Longer Walks Group

Our September walk was from Wickham Bishops. We completed a circular walk which included a stretch of the old Maldon to Witham Rail Line, passing by the deconsecrated St Peters Church. The church is 11th Century in origin, and originally the church and manor were possessions of the Bishops of London. The church is currently used by Benjamin Finn, a local stained-glass artist, whose work can be seen in a number of the restored windows.

The path also ran under the disused Wickham Bishops Viaduct. The viaduct built in 1847 is the only surviving example of a timber trestle railway viaduct. The line was in use for freight up to 18th April 1966, although it was closed to passenger traffic earlier on 7th September 1964. The path continued alongside a pretty stretch of the River Blackwater, and through the Benton Hall Golf Course, where we stopped for a coffee. We then continued, stopping briefly to visit St Bartholomew's Church, which is a much later Victorian Gothic church, built in 1850. We finished our walk with a lovely late lunch at Mrs Salisbury's in Wickham Bishops.

For October we stretched ourselves and ten of us enjoyed two walks in the Norfolk Broads. The first was a circular walk from the Surlingham Ferry Inn, alongside the River Yare, and the second was a circular walk from the Acle Bridge Inn, alongside the River Bure. The Surlingham walk included a visit to St Mary's Church, one of 124 existing round tower churches in Norfolk. It is a Norman Church, although the octagonal top section of the church is a 14th century addition.

The Acle Bridge walk took in the Upton Broad and Marshes Nature reserve, and we saw a variety of birds, red kites, heron, avocet, geese, ducks and swans, as well as numerous cows grazing on the marshes. Both walks, as is usual, included a coffee stop and a fine lunch to finish. We were blessed with some lovely walking weather for all three walks. Thank you to everyone in the group for some lovely walks and your company.

Peter Dixon – Group Leader



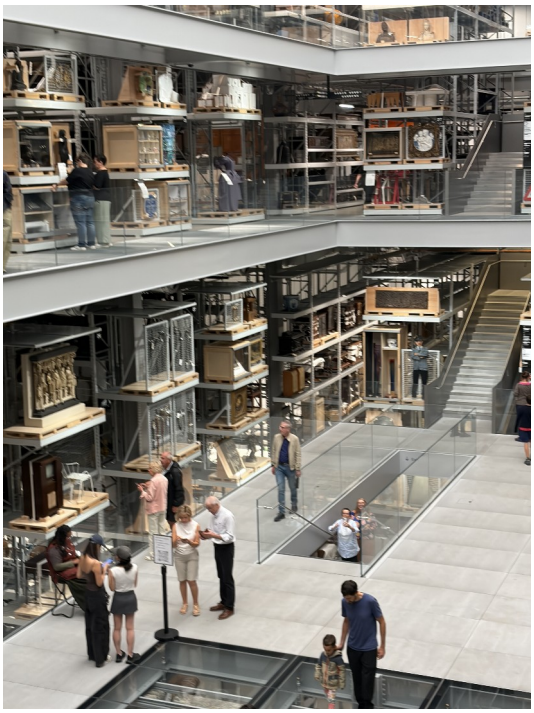








Serendipity 6 Visit



The Group spent an interesting day visiting the V&A East Storehouse in London which is a working museum store. The building is designed to get you closer to objects held in the V&A collections, and to the work of the museum. The central Weston Collections Hall is the in the centre and spread across three floors it reaches a height of over 20 metres. In the centre of the Collections Hall there is a section of glass flooring with a view down to the Agra Colonnade and working store below.

The Study Centre allows access to objects and items in storage at Storehouse. There are four study areas including the Clothworkers' Centre for the Study and Conservation of Textiles and Fashion.

Val Whitehouse

Visit Essex Churches Group

The Priory Church of St. Laurence, Blackmore was originally founded as a Augustinian Priory in 1170. A fine early Church with a famously picturesque and stunning wooden bell tower dating from 1400.

Our Group really enjoyed hearing about the historical journey of the Priory and land once owned by King Henry Vlll transferred in 1527 to Cardinal Wolsey. When he fell out of favour with the King it was sold to Smyth family for five generations until 1721. After the Reformation the village became poor. Thankfully in nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Church was restored.

Today the Church is not a museum but a witness to the worshipping generations who have loved and restored it to its historical glory today. It was well worth a visit. This is a vibrant, active Community Church for the people of Blackmore and visitors like ourselves.

Maureen & Peter Huntly



VIPE Members visit Maplestead

Our first visit was to St. Giles Church in Great Maplestead which was built in the 11th century. It is thought to stand on the site of a pagan temple which became used for services after the arrival of Christianity. The present Norman stone building is of exceptional interest, not only because so much early Norman work has survived but also due to the many alterations and additions made through the ages.

In 1612 the tower was struck by lightning, and the necessary rebuilding was done in the fashionable red brick of that period.

18th century neglect was followed by thorough Victorian restoration and care of this special building continues to the present day.

Our next visit was to St. John the Baptist Church in Little Maplestead, one of only 5 round churches built in the U.K. It was built on a site given to the Order of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem known as the Knights Hospitaller and is still associated with the Order today. Every year members of the Order can be seen in procession, clad in traditional full robes on the 1st Sunday in June.

The manor and church of Little Maplestead were given to the Knights Hospitaller in 1185 and it was around this time that a hospital was built and soon after a church for the Knights own use.

The present church was probably built around 1335 and is the latest of the 4 round churches still in use in England.

A pleasant lunch in the Kings Head pub in nearby Pebmarsh completed a very interesting visit to this part of Essex.

Val Whitehouse





Art Group

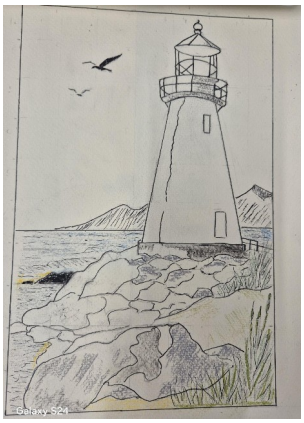
The Art Group met with a theme of Lighthouses – here are some of their creations.

Amanda Lowe













And finally…….. a few more photos from the Longer Walks Group that I couldn't quite fit in with the article!





