

*** Monthly Meeting – Thursday 22nd January***

Please join us at our next **Monthly Members’ meeting**.

It will start at **2pm** on **Thursday 22nd January** at **THE SHEPPEY HALL, QUEENBOROUGH**

Maunsell Forts: From Wartime Defence to Pirate Radio – Frank Turner

Looking strangely like the alien invaders from HG Wells’ War of the Worlds, “The Forts,” plonked in the Thames Estuary between Sheppey and Herne Bay, have fascinated both locals and visitors to Sheppey for 80 years.

That they are still visible for all to see is a testament to designer Guy Maunsell, a civil engineer who consistently thought outside the box. He built Putney Bridge in London and came up with an early design for the Mulberry Harbour, which was so crucial to the success of D-Day landings in Normandy.



Fears that Nazi aircraft would drop mines along the Thames prompted Maunsell to propose armed forts as a solution. His idea was eventually taken up by the Royal Navy.

The speaker is author and historian Frank Turner, from Gravesend, who is passionate about the Forts. He will be telling us all about their history, including their short-lived new lease of life as the base for various pirate radio stations in the mid-Sixties.

Save the date for next month: Thursday 26th February 2026!

Wartime and Romance – Andy Smith

COMING UP...

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Interest Groups & Activities	Page 3/4	Information about our groups and activities
National u3a u3aFriends Extra u3a Friends Newsletter	Page 5	Join the “u3a Friends” to access discounts on products and services. Sign up for the newsletter for all the up-to-date national u3a information
Online Learning Events	Page 5	There’s a wide range of national online talks, included in your membership for FREE! Why not check out what’s on offer during the cold dark winter days.
Interest Groups Online u3a	Page 5	A chance to try some of the groups of this online only u3a
u3a Radio Podcast u3a Learn & Share Kent u3a Network	Page 6	January’s edition deals with Climate Change, Gobekli Tepe and Laughter Yoga
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David's Slice of Life

Funerals can be made much more bearable with a bit of humour. It's always good to temper the solemnity of the occasion with a few laughs.

Earlier this month I attended a funeral, the script for which could have come straight from an episode of Fawlty Towers or Only Fools and Horses.

For the first time in my life (and probably the last) I found myself speaking directly to a coffin.

Not that it was planned that way.

The Strange Tale of the Missing Coffin would have been apt title for the episode.



The location was the lovely village church of St Nicolas, at Otham, near Maidstone. The funeral service was for Trevor Sturgess, former business editor of the Kent Messenger Group, and a 40-year friend and work colleague of mine. Trevor, a regular worshipper at the church, died suddenly aged 78 at the end of November.

The church was packed, standing room only. The only empty space was the pulpit.

The proceedings, to be followed later by a cremation, were due to start at 11am. But at 11.10am someone important was missing – Trevor.

The rather perplexed vicar explained to the assembled gathering that “there had been a technical hitch” and that the service would have to be delayed. “In my 50 years with the clergy,” he said, “nothing like this has ever happened before.”

What the vicar couldn't bring himself to say that the coffin and Trevor had gone missing.

Forty long minutes passed, with around 200 mourners shivering in the freezing cold church. There was much speculation that the hearse may have broken down, but there was no further information given to the congregation about the reason for the lengthy delay. I found out later that the funeral directors had booked their attendance at the service for 3pm, not 11am. I imagined the chaotic scenes when they found, on receipt of a panic phone call, that they had 30 minutes, not four hours, to prepare the coffin for the service. You couldn't make it up.

The service began at 11.45am when the coffin finally arrived. I was down to give one of the three “recollections” of Trevor's life, in my case his career at the KM. I suddenly remembered that Trevor's timekeeping had always been poor, usually because he tried to cram too much into his day.

With the hasty prior approval of Trevor's wife, Sue, I had a once-in-lifetime chance to crack an age-old joke, but in the perfect circumstance, standing a few feet from the coffin – and Trevor!

“Trevor,” I said, “during your career at the KM you were notorious for arriving late for meetings. Now you've managed to arrive late for your own funeral.”

It got a big laugh from the congregation, not least from Sue Sturgess.

After that, all went smoothly and Trevor was given the send-off he richly deserved.

Well, not quite that smoothly, as two people collapsed during the service, possibly suffering from hypothermia! Two more unscripted dramas to add to the Strange Tale of the Missing Coffin.

As I said, you couldn't make it up.....

INTEREST GROUPS & ACTIVITIES

Each interest group has its own communications list so, if you are interested in joining any of our interest groups, please sign up at one of our meetings or email us at: isleofsheppeyu3a@gmail.com

Find out more about our groups on our website: [Isle of Sheppey u3a Interest Groups information](#)

CHRISTMAS MEETING

The Christmas meeting was a very enjoyable afternoon, with entertainment by the Isle of Sheppey Singers followed by a lovely light afternoon tea. The afternoon tea was organised by the committee with sandwiches and mince pies plus sausage rolls and cakes made by Linda.



As usual we had our FREE Christmas raffle. Many members helped to organise the raffle prizes, with Val creating the Hamper, Linda making the Christmas cake and several members donating other great prizes. Of course, the “grown ups” absolutely must not allow the children to have all the fun, so we managed to commandeer Santa Claus (AKA our member, Micheal) to come and give out our prizes. Amongst the many prizes, Jill won the Christmas Hamper, Celia won the handbag, Irene won the Sherry and Gloria won the Christmas cake.



FLOWER ARRANGING GROUP



The Flower Arranging group joined with other community groups to create a decorated Christmas Tree for the Queenborough Church Christmas Festival. Members of the group provided a number of tiny flower arrangements each to decorate the tree. It looked rather spectacular once completely assembled.



SOCIAL HISTORY GROUP

Social History Group

Friday 16th January, 2025

Meeting Topic

What Did The Romans Do For Us?

No, this is not a Monty Python sketch analysis, but a fascinating and often surprising topic for investigation which the Social History Group had good fun researching and discussing.

This year we will be celebrating the 1083rd anniversary of the full Roman invasion of Britain, under Emperor Claudius, in AD 43. True, Julius Caesar had dipped his toe in British waters twice, nearly 90 years earlier to see how sociable the Britons were, and decided not to stay. Having, on this third try, "persuaded" the Britons to let them stay, the Romans overstayed their welcome, but in compensation for being so pushy and demanding, they introduced many life-improving objects, changes, services, ideas and benefits, and left many of them behind when they finally got the message and left these islands nearly 400 years later.

The Social History Group's researches and discussion highlighted that, during their occupation of Britain, the Romans introduced such principles as fast food outlets and field hospitals (for their troops), advertising and trademarks (maker's name on pottery and displays on billboards), global currency (Roman currency was used throughout the Empire), bureaucracy, towns and administrative centres and a regular census (Indiction). They also established a type of police and fire service in the form of 'Vigilias' (uniformed civilian public watchkeepers). They also had an official postal delivery service (upon which the Americans based their 'Pony Express') which would put the present Royal Mail's standards of delivery to shame.

The Roman's architecture and roads building principles and techniques are well known, as are their achievements in sanitation, sewerage and central heating, public sports and baths facilities and civil administrative buildings. What is less common knowledge is their skill at town planning and their inception of the apartments block for high density urban development, as in Londinium, Colchester, Lincoln and many other Roman new towns.

In trying to round up these and many other benefits of Roman occupation and influence in this country and throughout much of the world, it became clear that the Romans were not great inventors, like the ancient Greeks and Chinese. They were, however, very pragmatic, great administrators and thus great innovators. They took advantage of the knowledge and skills of those nations that they conquered, and adapted and improved that which they had acquired for their own benefit and, subsequently, the benefit of all those they governed. To this day, there are many extant examples surviving of those long-term benefits throughout Europe and the Mediterranean regions. What was once seen of Roman dominance as hated conquest and suppression, is now seen in a broader and more benevolent light, giving credence to the Monty Python anthem:

"Always Look on the Bright Side of Life"

Social History Group

Future Research and Discussion Topics

20th February, 2026Jewellery Through the Ages

20th March, 2026Farming Through the Ages

17th April, 2026Travel Through the Ages

15th May, 2026Humour Through the Ages

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEWSLETTER

Thank you again to all those who have provided contributions this month.

Please let us know if you have any other contributions, including from Interest Groups or for local community events. Send them to isleofsheppeyu3a@gmail.com. Deadline for inclusion in the February newsletter is **Friday 20th February**.

NATIONAL u3a

Have you looked on the National u3a website? There's so much u3a members across the country are getting involved with.

SAVE MONEY WITH u3a FRIENDS EXTRA

u3a friends is a community open to all our u3a members. As part of this community our members have access to a wide range of offers, discounts and additional services. Friends can make savings on well-known brands, shopping, travel, day out and much more. Find out more here: [u3a Friends Extra Presentation](#)

u3a FRIENDS - NEWSLETTER

Sign up to get the most up to date news from National Office and find out the latest news and learning events as they are added. You will also get a link to the FRIENDS EXTRA benefits website.

Click here to find out more about what there is on offer nationally [National u3a](#). New events added monthly so, have a look and see if there's anything interesting that you'd like to join with in the next few weeks.

ONLINE LEARNING EVENTS

There are numerous and wide-ranging learning events and short courses (usually free online using zoom), **Coming up soon January/February/March: [u3a online events](#)**

- How do your medicines work? Asthma
- Smart Cities with u3a Let's Talk Tech
- The World's Most Enchanted Archipelagos – A Voyage through the Scottish Hebrides
- Artificial Intelligence News: January
- The Calendar, Time and the Cosmos part 1
- Why Snails might hold some answers to age-related memory loss
- Cryptic Crosswords in Context
- The Story of Tootje (Cato) Granaat 1026-2020
- The Calendar, Time and the Cosmos part 2
- Preparing for an AI World
- Flight Inspirations Aviation Meeting: February
- After Alzheimer: Memory, Ageing and What Comes Next
- How do your medicines work? Hypertension
- The technological challenges in delivering the HS2 railway line
- Smashing particles – behind the scenes at CERN
- The Mathematicians' Library Tech for All: Innovations supporting disability and ageing
- The Calendar, Time and the Cosmos part 3
- How do your medicines work? Pain Relief
- Gravy or Grave? The ghost in literature
- Live Cookery Demonstration – Winter Warmers
- Memoir writing with Jenny Newman
- Introduction to cryptic crosswords
- Novel writing with Jenny Newman
- Wellbeing Taster Morning with u3a Subject Advisers
- Brew Monday – Bollywood Laughter Yoga Dance
- Meditation & Mindfulness continuation sessions
- Laughter Yoga with Merrie Maggie – February
- Laughter Yoga with Judith – February

INTEREST GROUPS ONLINE (IGO) FAIR

Interest Groups Online (IGO) is an online u3a community that gives you the opportunity to join groups, talks and courses from the comfort of your home. Membership is currently £12 per year.

The Fair offers free taster groups on Wednesday 11th, Thursday 12th & Friday 13th February.

Find out more about the Interest Groups Online u3a here: [Interest Groups Online u3a](#)

- Creative Writing
- Exploring Progressive Rock
- Sign Language
- Fusion Tai Qi Gong
- Local History
- Intermediate Recorders
- Dance Exercise
- Setting up a new group
- IGO Canva course group
- Early Women Doctors

NATIONAL u3a – RADIO PODCAST

Have you listened to the latest monthly **u3a Radio podcasts** on YouTube? A new episode is uploaded during the third week of the month. Click here for the latest edition as well as the full list of radio podcasts since they started: [u3a Radio Podcast Playlist](#)



NATIONAL LEARN & SHARE ACTIVITIES

Enter your poetry and short stories in the competitions, submit your paintings/drawings and photographs to be featured in the online galleries. See what other members across the country have already submitted and see if you can spot anything from our Isle of Sheppey u3a members. Take part or just browse other members’ submissions. Get involved by clicking here: [Learn & Share Activities](#)

Enter Your Photography & Art

- The “Still Got It” Photography Project
- Paint or Draw – New theme each month
- u3a Eye – Themed Photography Project
- Found in Nature – Photo Gallery of all things weird and wonderful in nature

Puzzles & Games

- Logic Puzzles
- Maths Challenge
- Aileen’s Game
- Where Am I?
- The u3a Quiz Library

Writing Competitions

Short Story 2025 – Competition closed
 Essay Competition 2025 – Competition now closed
 Read the winning entries on the u3a website

Connect with Members

- Virtual Visits
- u3a Walkers’ Exchange
- Find a u3a Speaker

u3a SOURCES BLOG

Read the u3a blog dedicated to sharing, inspiring and learning. Interesting and thought-provoking articles from around the country, giving insights into other u3as doing what all u3as do best ‘Learn, Laugh, Live”. Find the blog on the national website, click here: [u3a Sources](#)

KENT u3a NETWORK

The Kent u3a Network comprises of the 32 u3as across the Kent region. Representatives from each u3a meet periodically to share ideas, events, speakers and training session, to discuss issues and to support each other. Our committee members attend and keep in touch with the Kent u3a Network which has been an invaluable help in setting up and maintaining our u3a over the past few years.

You can find more information on their website: [Kent u3a Network Website](#)

As a member of Isle of Sheppey u3a you can also join their private discussion Facebook group: [Kent u3a Network Facebook Group](#)

MONTHLY MEETING DATES 2026

Meetings are held on the fourth Thursday of each month (except in December) at 2pm until 4pm, at The Sheppey Hall in Queenborough. Refreshments are included Doors open 1.40pm.

26th February
26th March
23rd April
28th May (AGM)

25th June
23rd July
27th August
24th September

22nd October
26th November
10th December

JUST FOR FUN - SOME ACCIDENTAL INVENTIONS

VELCRO

Out on a hunting trip in 1948 with his trusty canine companion, Swiss engineer George de Mestral noticed the annoying tendency burrs had to stick to his socks and his dog's fur.

Back at home, giving the burrs an examination underneath his microscope, George noticed the tiny 'hooks' that stuck burrs to both fabric and fur.

Mestral experimented for years with a variety of textiles before having a play with the newly invented nylon, and Velcro was born.

However, it wasn't until roughly two decades later that Velcro's popularity boomed after NASA took a particular liking to the stick-and-rip stuff.



SAFETY GLASS

The year is 1903 and French chemist Édouard Bénédictus is chilling out in his lab, mixing up some potions, when he accidentally knocks a flask off his desk, sending it to fall to the ground and shatter... or not.

Bemused by the way the flask had not smashed into a hundred pieces on impact, Édouard stooped down to take a closer look.

Upon inspection, the chemist realised that the flask had contained cellulose nitrate, a type of plastic and that this had coated the inside, thus preventing it from shattering upon impact.

Inspired by this mere mishap, Édouard Bénédictus went on to invent Safety Glass, something used on a mass-global level even today.

SUPER GLUE

In 1942, Dr. Harry Coover set out to create a new precision rifle sight but failed epically. The substance he created, cyanoacrylate, was an utter failure – it stuck to everything.



Deflated and dejected, Coover gave up and moved on, his invention forgotten.

Fast forward 6 years and Coover is overseeing an experimental new design for aeroplane canopies. Once again, he found himself sticking to things because of that damned cyanoacrylate! This time, however, Coover had a light-bulb moment and observed how this substance formed incredibly strong bonds between objects with no heat applied. This set him and his team to thinking, and with a little tinkering, sticking objects in the lab together, they realized they'd found a use for this annoying gloop.

Coover whacked a patent on the discovery and in 1958, 16 years after he'd first gotten stuck, Super Glue was being sold on shelves all around the world.

Information & Contact Details

You can contact us here:

Isleofsheppeyu3a@gmail.com

Email us to join our WhatsApp Group:

Isleofsheppeyu3a@gmail.com

Find our website here:

<https://isle-of-sheppey.u3asite.uk/>

Interact with u3a members around the country:

[u3a: Keeping in Touch Facebook Group](#)

Our Facebook Page is:

<https://www.facebook.com/isleofsheppeyu3a>

[Kent u3a Network Website](#)

Our members only Facebook Group is:

[Members Only Facebook Group](#)

[Kent u3a Network Facebook Group](#)

Diversity & Inclusion Statement

Isle of Sheppey u3a recognises that everyone is different and aims to create an environment that values and treats all members fairly. We are committed to promoting equality and diversity and to ensure that u3a membership is as accessible as possible to different groups within the community.