u3a learn, laugh, live

ISLE of SHEPPEY OCTOBER 2026

* Monthly Meeting – Thursday 22nd October *

Please join us at our next **Monthly Members' meeting**.
It will start at **2pm** on **Thursday 22nd October** at **THE SHEPPEY HALL, QUEENBOROUGH**

The Maunsell Sea Forts – Frank Turner

Looking strangely like the alien invaders from HG Wells' War of the Worlds, the Red Sands Forts, plonked in the Thames Estuary between Sheppey and Whitstable, have fascinated both locals and visitors to the Island for more than 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 vital Thames Estuary shipping lanes prompted Maunsell to propose armed forts as a solution. His idea was eventually taken up by the Royal Navy.

Our speaker, author and historian Frank Turner from Gravesend, is passionate about the Forts and 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

··· Still standing after 80 years - the iconic Red Sands Forts, with historian Frank Turner (inset)

Save the date for next month: Thursday 26th November 2026

The Titanic – Eddie Asquith

COMING UP…

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National u3a **u3a Friends Newsletter** **u3a Friends Extra** **u3a Radio Podcast**	Page 7	**u3a Online Learning Events & u3a Learn & Share** Look out for interesting online talks and events Find out how to save money as u3a Friend Listen to the monthly podcast
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David's Slice of Life

Our Slice of Life comes each month, courtesy of our member David Jones



"I'm really sorry and I do apologise," said Arthur, who answered the phone when I finally broke through the digital barricades surrounding the airline's customer services department. Arthur had an odd, mechanical-sounding American accent and he was so grovellingly apologetic I wondered for a moment whether he was actually human.

Was I chatting to Arthur, the Friendly Robot? You know how it is these days. It's only slightly less than miraculous if you get to speak to a sentient being.

But Arthur was definitely human, or at least I think he was. Would a robot promise us Champagne and chocolates to compensate for the way in which we had been messed about by the airline on whose plane we would be travelling in a few days' time? We're never going to say No to free Champagne and chocolates, even at 7am.

We weren't exactly on a package holiday but one of those trips where customers are required to book some of the constituent parts themselves.

The airline appeared to be efficient, apart from one minor problem – they forgot to send us the tickets! They then forgot to send me a receipt for our hold baggage payment. This is where Arthur came in. While I was still drooling over the prospect of free Champers and chocs, even at an early hour, Arthur also promised faithfully to email me the required receipt in a few minutes.

You can probably guess what's coming. Neither Champagne nor the chocolates ever appeared. Nor did the receipt. Not that I was surprised.

There was more incompetence to come, from a different company this time. I had to book transfers from airport to hotel and return. They appeared to be efficient, apart from another minor problem. They forgot to send me the vouchers I had to present to the taxi driver. By now, I was contemplating pulling out in sheer frustration what little hair I have left. I finally got the vouchers after more hassle with yet another customer service department.



"What I did on my holidays" tales guaranteed to bore most people silly are one of my pet hates, so I have (I hope) avoided inflicting such dreary reminiscences on you, complete with a photograph of us both on sun loungers. I have spared you that! The point of this exercise is to express my disbelief that even more incompetent companies involved with the holiday travel industry have not joined the many who have gone bust in the last couple of years.

Maybe I was just unlucky. Or have these travel companies become so large that the promised standards of customer service have degenerated into nothing more than a hollow slogan.

With many companies – and not just travel companies - it is now impossible to speak to a human being. You have to communicate by email (if you are lucky) or, far more likely, end up having a futile conversation with one of those awful chatbots.

If you think it's bad now, it's going to get worse as artificial intelligence takes over the world. I think Donald Trump might be right – for once. The word "artificial" is far too feeble a term to describe what AI has in store for us all!

On the other hand, could AI do a lot worse than some of the incompetent living, breathing human beings I have had the misfortune to deal with over the last two months?

Having said all that, we did encounter five really efficient individuals on our trip - the two pilots (phew!), our taxi driver Boris (no, I didn't make that name up), a waiter and, finally, the young lady at our resort airport check-in who got us out of a real hole when we realised at the last moment

that we had been extremely stupid in thinking we could take our two duty-free bottles of gin on board the plane in our hand luggage. A mixture of sunshine and relaxing, stress-free days can, I confess, bring on the occasional senior moment. She let us check in the bag as hold luggage – for free, when it should have been a whopping £70. This, perish the thought, would have left us no choice but to throw away the gin, which cost £22. Sacrilege!

If only we had some tonic, we'd raise a glass to her right now.

PS: In case you're wondering, which you probably aren't, we had a great holiday – eventually! And in case you're also wondering about the photo – that's not us, just two models from a travel brochure, though I admit it's hard to tell!

EXCURSION INFORMATION

Hever Castle Two course Christmas Lunch & tour of Festive Castle Grounds

Date:	**Wednesday 2nd December**
Cost:	**£56 pp**
Reference:	**Hever**
Final payment Due by:	**Thursday 22nd October**
Spaces Available:	**FULL**

We will be collecting the final payment by cash or cheque for this excursion at the October general meeting, BACS deposits may be made at any time by the final payment date, using the reference 'Hever' and the payment details in your email. Final payments are due by 22nd October, as this is a very popular excursion and we need to pay Hever in advance. This excursion is now full so please make payment promptly and note that the price has reduced.

SUNDAY CARVERY LUNCH @ The Masonic – Sunday 25th October

The Sunday lunch group is open to all members and their guests. The next Sunday Lunch is on Sunday 25th October. We meet in the bar at 12.30pm for a relaxing and sociable drink and then move into the hall ready for our lunch at 1pm.

These lunches always prove popular with our members and at £22 per person are excellent value for money. The meal is a carvery with a choice of meats, a wide range of vegetables including cauliflower cheese and the usual accompaniments of Yorkshire pudding, stuffing and pigs in blankets. Alternative diets can be catered for when pre-booked. There will be a variety of desserts to choose from, plus cheese and biscuits followed by tea/coffee and mints. Wine and other drinks can be purchased at the bar at a very reasonable cost.







There is plenty of space so if you would like to go, please email us to be added to the Sunday Lunch group and to confirm your place. Bookings should ideally be made by Monday 19th October to order for the meals to be booked with the caterer, although it is usually possible to add a few extra people after this date.



MONTHLY MEETING ATTENDENCE REGISTER

We have decided that we will trial a different system for the monthly meeting attendance register. There will be a blank register at the entrance to the hall for you to record your name (legibly please), this will free Sally up to be available for discussions prior to the meeting and to ensure new members are greeted and made welcome – Celia will also be on hand to greet new members/visitors.

We do like to make sure our new members feel included from the very start so if you are seated with a new member(s) please try to engage them in conversation, if you feel you might run out of seats at your table for your group, please let us know so we add more chairs rather that turn people away.

INTEREST GROUPS

Find out more about our groups on our website:
Isle of Sheppey u3a Interest Groups information

If you are interested in joining any of our interest groups, please sign up at one of our meetings or email Lynda at: lynda.oldfield52@gmail.com

If you have any questions about the groups or would like help to set up a group, please email Lynda or phone her on 07599302946.

We are still looking to see if we have anyone who could help a group of members who would like to learn some basic French as they are not yet competent enough to join the existing French conversation group. If you think you could help please get in touch with Lynda.

We have also had some enquiries about a creative writing group from a long-standing member Peter Paskell. So, if anyone would be interested in enjoying putting pen to paper with a group of enthusiasts, please also get in touch with Lynda. In the meantime, we may be able to kick start a group with a one-off workshop if we have the interest and can find someone with the skills to facilitate the workshop.

WORKSHOPS

We have in the past been able to provide some one-off workshops e.g. Flower Arranging demonstrations, an Art class and a How to create a Wild Garden get together.

The committee has agreed to apply to some of our local councils for some funding to help us provide more of these opportunities for members to get together and try out new skills and we would welcome suggestions and help to organise these where possible.

This is a good way for members to get involved and learn a bit more about the volunteer side but not be committed to a longer-term group or project. Workshops normally involve getting a non-member with a bit of experience/expertise in the subject to demonstrate or present the subject/topic and to pass on some hints and tips.

Suggestions we have so far are:

Pottery	Creative Writing	Yoga/Tai chi
Art	Singing for Fun	Sound bath

POP-UP GROUPS

Pop up groups are one-off or short duration groups that are facilitated by members and are also a great way to get involved with a limited project. Sally has suggested that she would organise a series of pop-up craft groups where members can try out a different craft as a one off each time.

If you have suggestions for anymore workshops or pop-up groups, please let us know.

SOCIAL HISTORY GROUP – David Gooding

Fortress Kent

Social History Group

October Meeting Topic

Since the dawn of civilization, Britain has been menaced by foreign powers and invading hordes, intent either to pillage and plunder or to invade and rule over this fair land. Situated on the extreme south-eastern corner of these favoured Isles, and the nearest point to continental Europe, Kent has inevitably been the preferred landing place for most of these incursions. The Social History Group established that Men of Kent and Kentish Men have had to erect, defend and maintain structures from Iron Age forts to Tudor gun fortresses, 1940s pillboxes to Radar masts and Royal Military Canals to anti-tank ditches carved out of the chalk hills around Kent's coasts.

Kent is well stocked with castles, and yet, of the thirty-one castles established in this county, only five may classify as castles designed for military purposes. The remainder were designed to impress and to convey a sense of power for its owners. Even some that were established to defend the county were found wanting, especially when the Group's discussion turned to the Dutch attack on the River Medway in 1667. Upnor Castle, which is actually only a blockhouse, failed miserably in its defence of Chatham Dockyard because, being sited opposite the dockyard entrance, only half of its guns pointed downriver towards approaching ships; the remainder pointed directly at the dockyard it was built to defend. The castle was immediately relegated to the role of store and magazine.

Whilst Dover Castle gave a good account of itself throughout its long history, and Rochester Castle had its tough moments dealing with King John, the fortifications and defences built around Kent's coast during the reign of Henry VIII and during the Regency and Victorian eras, namely the castles of Deal and Walmer, the Martello Towers and the Thames Forts, never had to prove themselves. Maybe this was because they looked so formidable to the prospective enemy. None of these defences ever fired a shot in anger, the latter forts and towers assuming the title of "Palmerston's Follies".

The research and resulting discussions of the Group members highlighted Kent's leading role in the defence of its country, be it by land, sea or by air. With its two dockyards at Chatham and Sheerness, and its fighter stations at Biggin Hill, Manston, Hawkinge and Eastchurch, the County continued its historic share of the burden of Gt Britain's defence well into the twentieth century. This was complemented by the creation, in the mid 1930s, of huge listening devices in the form of giant, curved, concrete walls and dishes designed to reflect the sound of approaching aircraft onto a listening microphone. As aircraft became faster, these devices quickly became obsolete. Their places were taken by the steel masts of the "Chain Home" Radar system which, it may be argued, did as much to save this country during the 1940s as did "The Few".

We are now safely established into the 21st century and our "Fortress Kent" has become "Museum Kent". Instead of standing guard around the county against the would-be invader, the Men of Kent and Kentish Men entice mankind to see and learn about what gave Kent its motto "Invicta", whether they arrive by air, tunnel, ferry or small boat. This county which once held the key to the kingdom and fought to protect its position as gatekeeper, now has no significance in this country's defences, all of its facilities having been passed elsewhere.

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 or Just for Fun articles. Send them to isleofsheppeyu3a@gmail.com. Deadline for inclusion in the **NOVEMBER** newsletter is **Friday 20th November**.

Website Publish date Sunday 22nd November

COMMUNITY EVENTS

UPCOMING COMMUNITY MARKET & CRAFT FAIR





SHEPPEY MATTERS - RETRAIN THE PAIN

Are you living in pain from a health condition or injury? Then why not come along to the Retrain the Pain meetings on the last Friday of each month



Date: Friday 30th October at 10am – 12 noon

Location: Masonic Club, 1-3 St Georges Avenue, Sheerness ME12 1QX

No need to book, you are welcome to turn up



For more information call or text: Indre on 07541 995740 or e-mail: juliec@sheppeymatters.org.uk

CRITERION BLUETOWN



All are welcome at the little gem hidden in Blue Town, Sheerness.

The Criterion Bluetown encompasses; Bluetown Museum & Heritage Centre, Criterion Theatre & Music Hall, Criterion Friday Film Club, Tea Rooms & Licensed Bar.



For more information: https://www.thecriterionbluetown.co.uk/

SHEPPEY LITTLE THEATRE – Entertaining Sheppey for more than 50 years

The theatre is run by the Sheppey Entertainment Association which is a registered charity. They rely on income from their shows and donations to continue to operate and the theatre is run by volunteers from the community for the benefit of the community. Here are some of the upcoming events. For more information: https://www.sheppeylittletheatre.co.uk/events-2/









NATIONAL u3a

Have you looked on the National u3a website lately?
There's so much for u3a members across the country to get involved with!

ONLINE LEARNING EVENTS

There are numerous and wide-ranging learning events and short courses (usually free online using zoom – book via Eventbrite). **Coming up soon October/November/December**: **u3a online events**

- Future Lives – keeping warm and cutting energy bills
- Delivered to your door – the complexities of efficient parcel delivery
- David Hockney as I knew him
- The US constitution versus unitary executive power
- Secrets of the human brain: behaviour and personality
- Art deco days
- The history of pirate radio
- Preparing for an AI world
- Soulsville USA series – The History and Legacy of Stax Records
- Melancholy as a creative force: Joni Mitchell's Blue album
- Staying Safe Online – A u3a Presentation with Q&A
- Exploring world faiths: November
- Shaping fashion: the Elizabethan bodice, buckram and busks
- Screening to prevent stroke: so we do too much or too little
- Future Lives: thinking ahead, care and support options in later life
- The ultimate guide to editing your creative writing
- Learn bridge with u3a
- Flight Inspirations aviation group: December
- Capturing your youth: memoir writing in 12 easy steps Laughter Yoga with Merrie Maggie: October & November
- Laughter Yoga with Judith: November
- Mindfulness and meditation series

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

Connect with Members

- u3a rewind
- Missing Pieces
- Virtual Visits
- u3a Walkers' Exchange
- Find a u3a Speaker

Writing Competitions

Essay Competition 2026 - "The Most Incredible Journey"
Read the winning short stories and full shortlist
Essay competition 2025 – "Lost and Found"
Read the winning short stories and full shortlist

Puzzles & Games

- Logic Puzzles
- Maths Challenge
- Aileen's Game
- The u3a Quiz Library

NATIONAL u3a – RADIO PODCAST

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



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**

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.

JUST FOR FUN

Twins have unique prints: Identical twins do not have the same fingerprints because womb development factors (like position and umbilical cord length) change them

Leftover pasta is healthier: Cooked and cooled pasta contains more resistant starch, which helps improve gut health and blood sugar control

A daily tropical storm: A massive thunderstorm named Hector the Convector hits the Tiwi Islands in northern Australia at 3pm every single day from September to March

The Eiffel Tower grows: The iron tower can grow up to 15cm taller during hot summer days due to thermal expansion

A shrimp's heart is in its head: In a shrimp's anatomy, the main heart is located right behind its head

Octopuses build gardens: Octopuses collect shells, rocks, and bottles to construct protective "gardens" or dens on the ocean floor

Sloths have extra bones: Sloths have more neck vertebrae than giraffes, allowing them to turn their heads almost all the way around

Kangaroos cannot walk backward: Due to the shape of their large tails and back legs, kangaroos can only hop forward

Antarctica is a desert: Because it receives very little precipitation, Antarctica is technically the largest desert in the world

The Universe has a colour: Astronomers calculated that the average colour of light from all galaxies is a soft beige tone called "Cosmic latte"

Trees outnumber stars: There are more trees on Earth (trillions) than there are estimated stars in the Milky Way galaxy (billions)

Days are getting longer: Earth's rotation is slowing down, which means the length of a day increases by about 1.8 seconds every century

Venetian days beat years: A single day on Venus (one full rotation) takes longer than a full orbit around the Sun (a year on Venus)

Saturn could float: Saturn is mostly made of gas and has a density lower than water, meaning it would float in a giant bathtub

Mars is egg-shaped: Unlike other rocky planets, Mars is shaped like a rugby ball rather than a sphere

Clouds are heavy: A typical cloud weighs around a million tonnes despite being able to float in the air

Egypt has rivals in pyramids: Sudan actually has about 255 pyramids, which is more than Egypt

Honey never spoils: Archaeologists have found pots of honey in ancient Egyptian tombs that are over 3,000 years old and still safe to eat

Penguins propose with pebbles: Male gentoo penguins spend a lot of time searching for the smoothest, most attractive pebble to present to a female penguin as a proposal gift

MONTHLY MEETING DATES

Meetings are held on the fourth Thursday of each month (*except in December- see below*) starting at 2pm until 4pm, at The Sheppey Hall in Queenborough. Refreshments are included. Doors open 1.30pm.

2026	**2027**	
	28th January	**22nd April**
26th November	**25th February**	**27th May**
10th December - Christmas Meeting	**25th March**	**24th June**

Information & Contact Details

You can contact us here:
Isleofsheppeyu3a@gmail.com

Find our website here:
https://isle-of-sheppey.u3asite.uk/

Our Facebook Page is:
https://www.facebook.com/isleofsheppeyu3a

Our members only Facebook Group is:
Members Only Facebook Group

Email us to join our WhatsApp Group:
Isleofsheppeyu3a@gmail.com

Interact with u3a members around the country:
u3a: Keeping in Touch Facebook Group

Kent u3a Network Website

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.