A Brief History of Burnham-On-Crouch u3a

The National u3a

The u3a, or University of the Third Age, was conceived and introduced in France in 1973, its aim being to further educate and stimulate retired members of the community. Universities were directly involved, hence the University in the title, and the concept has now become worldwide.

However, in 1982 when the scheme was introduced into the UK the direct link with a University was not maintained. Instead it was acknowledged that many people retired with a lifetime of knowledge and experience which they should be encouraged to share with their neighbours. Branches were set up around the country and there are now 870 u3as and over 295,000 members. Group leaders with specialist knowledge run their own meetings on specific subjects ranging from Art to Zoology, over 300 are covered across the country. They aim to satisfy the widest range of interests: educational, cultural, recreational, physical and social. Membership for individual u3as can vary from 20 to 2,000 people. Local u3as are self-supporting charities run by elected committees and require a yearly subscription. There are currently 28 u3as in Essex. The head office, The Third Age Trust, provides educational and administrative support to all UK u3as and their members, and assists in the development of new branches across the country.

The website address of the National U3A is http://www.u3a.org.uk/

The Burnham-on-Crouch u3a

The Burnham-on-Crouch u3a was started in 1999 by Anne Woolfson with fewer than 30 members. In 2022, membership stands at over 260. What follows is a potted history which was produced to celebrate our 10-year anniversary in 2009:

The Beginning

One of the first letters from The Third Age Trust and an item from the Maldon and Burnham Standard circa March 2000 give a flavour of those early days....

U3A
THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

THE THIRD AGE TRUST

26 Harrison Street London WC1H 8JG
Telephone: 0171-837 8838 • Fax: 0171-837 8845
e-mail: national.office@u3a.org.uk • web site: http://u3a.org.uk

Anne Woolfson
1 The Quay
Burnham on Crouch
Essex CM0 8AS

3 August 1999

Dear Anne,

I am delighted to confirm that Burnham U3A has been granted temporary membership of the Third Age Trust until the end of October 1999, and I look forward to receiving your application for formal admission in due course.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Lin Jonas

Lin Jonas
Company Secretary



Never too late to learn

One of the most popular groups study investments

by GILL MARINER

WHAT do thinking people do when they retire?

Watch endless docu-soaps and daytime chat shows? Sit in the corner and wait to die?

Not in Burnham they don't.

Already never-too-late-to-learn over-50s [illegible] new branch of the University of the Third Age (U3A), a worldwide organisation which also has a branch in Maldon.

And more are showing interest all the time.

The beauty of U3A is that you don't have to pass A-levels or take an Access course to join. All you need is an interest in something. Almost anything.

Better still if you can spark interest from others in your favourite subject or hobby and lead a group, U3A activities are limited only by the imagination of its members.

New groups are forming all the time – at the moment Burnham U3A has group meetings on investments, creative writing, Scrabble, play reading, Italian, art appreciation, literature, rambling, Spanish, music and cookery.

Retired businesswoman Anne Woolfson launched U3A Burnham following a suggestion from busy Burnham Bookshop owner and local councillor Una Norman.

Anne, 70, once produced the famous Burnham mustards in her cottage kitchen on the Quay.

When Wilkin & Sons of Tiptree took over production of her mustards, she opened a tearoom in her house and ran it for nine years until she retired in 1998.

"Then I thought: Oh, what am I going to do now?"

U3A has proved a godsend to people like Anne. Not only is she chairman of the Burnham branch, she has joined six of its groups and is currently launching the cookery group with her secretary, Beth Greaves.

Not all the group leaders are professionals in their chosen subject. The man who leads creative writing has produced plays for TV and radio, but the man who teaches Italian isn't Italian and the woman who teaches Spanish isn't Spanish!

All you need is a love of your subject, says Anne.

She is proposing pooled activities among the groups such as an outdoor Italian meal in summer prepared by the cookery group for fellow members and partners.

The most popular group to date is the investment group. Nearly half Burnham U3A's members want to know how to get the most out of their savings.

In the early days a few people came to meetings "to be spoonfed," says Anne.

"But it is up to the members to organise things. We don't just sit there, it's a sharing process. Anybody wanting to start something only needs to get more than two people involved."

Each member pays an annual £12 subscription to U3A – plus the occasional small fee for equipment or books – and attends the monthly general meetings at the Kings Hall behind Burnham Constitutional Club.

Visitors and would-be members are welcome to attend these monthly meetings at £1 a head. There is always a guest speaker followed by question time and an update on group activities.

IF you live in or near Burnham, you are over 50 and retired and you'd like to share your hobby with others of like mind, ring Anne Woolfson for more details of Burnham U3A on 01621 783868.

AN INSPIRATION – to fellow members is Anne Woolfson, chairman of Burnham U3A.

Membership

Membership numbers have risen from around 30 in 1999 to over 260 in 2022. *(Interesting note: the subscription back in 2000 was £12; for renewals, it has only risen to £13 in 2024. Ed.)*

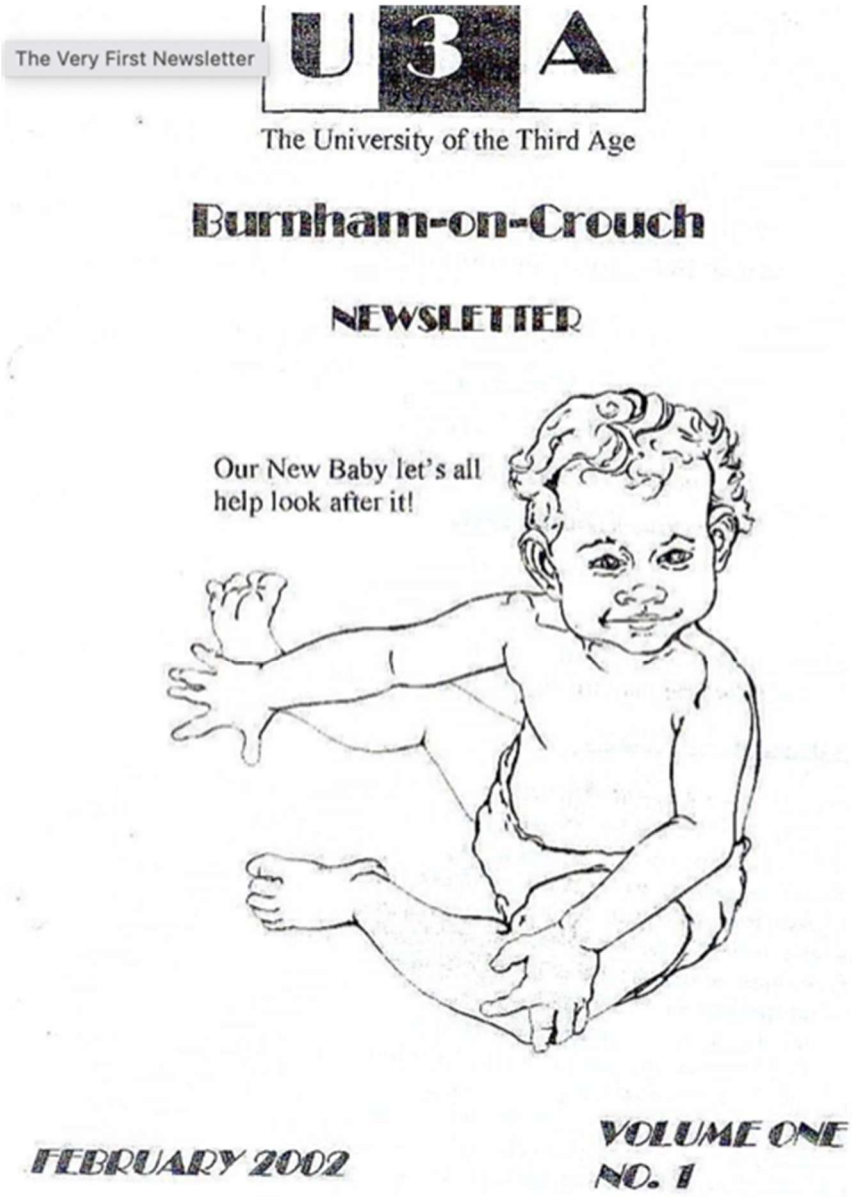
Interest Groups

The life blood of the u3a is of course the interest groups. Back in 2000, the groups numbered a mere 11 – in 2024 there are almost 30.

Newsletter

The first copy of the Burnham-on-Crouch u3a Newsletter hit the news-stands in February 2002. It was edited (and produced) by Yvonne Charge. She did a sterling job for over 6 years and her last copy was the June 2008 issue. During that time, we charged 20p for the Newsletter to cover printing costs, but from late 2006 is has been free. When the next set of editors (Therese Davidson,

Patsy Stringer and Frances Gretton) took over, the Newsletter started to appear with colour printing (the committee having finally relented on the higher costs!)



Venues

Remember the Kings Hall?



We survived there until April 2004 and then, as the article below explains, we outgrew ourselves

32 Essex Chronicle, Thursday, May 13, 2004

Community News

Burnham



Welcome new venue

UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE. – Last week, members were welcomed by chairman David Greaves to their first meeting at their new venue, Burnham Ramblers Football Club. Nearly 60 people attended which was the average number at the King's Hall. The spacious hall at the club was much appreciated and has meant that there can again be sales of books, plants and cards, as well as room to move around during the tea break. The chairman made the welcome announcement that the starting time can revert to 2pm, as from next month.

Nowadays, we meet in the Village (Carnival) Hall in Burnham-On-Crouch.

Grants

We have been lucky enough to receive various grants over the years. In 2003, we received £500 to purchase two table-tennis tables.



Maldon and Burnham Standard, October 23, 2003

Jackpot for table tennis players

TABLE tennis players have never had it so good in Burnham.

The town's University of The Third Age group recently received an Awards for All grant of £500 towards the purchase of two new tables.

Every week group members pick up their bats to play at the town's St Peter's School and the group was presented with the award by its headteacher, Hazel Steele.

And the school was so impressed with the tables – supplied by Ray Brasted of Yours in Sport, Burnham – that it has purchased two more tables for its own pupils.

As well as table tennis, U3A members also enjoy other activities including ballroom dancing, art and computer studies at the school.

Sporting success – Hazel Steele presents the award to geoff Charge, U3A branch vice chairman. 30871-1

In 2006 we received a grant which enabled us to buy a computer, and projection and audio equipment used at our monthly meetings.



At the other end of the (financial) scale, in 2021 we received almost £12,000 to allow our Archaeology interest group to secure the services of a professional archaeologist who supervised our work excavating a previously unknown 11th century stone building, revealed as belonging to the then Bishop of London.



A few other notable events along the way



In Memoriam

The passing of time is not without its sorrows. Anne Harding (Woolfson), a founder member of the Burnham u3a, died in 2004. A bench dedicated to her memory was installed at Burnham Quay in January 2006.



Standard, Wednesday, February 1, 2006

Covering Burnham, Maldon, Southminster and the Dengie Hundred villages

A place to remember a friend to all

● Fond memory – among those remembering the U3A founding member at the unveiling of the Anne Harding Woolfson bench on Burnham Quay are, front, centre, Anne's son Peter Woolfson, chairman Beth Greaves, press officer Barbara Chappell, and Anne's husband Tony Harding. Picture: DEREK ARGENT (47342-1)

A WELL-KNOWN member of Burnham's community will have her memory live on through the dedication of a bench situated at the waterside.

Anne Harding, one of the founding members of Burnham's University of the Third Age (U3A), sadly died last year, but the organisations with which she was involved have installed a bench in her memory at Burnham Quay.

A special dedication service took place last Wednesday.

All representatives of the U3A and other clubs were in attendance, as well as her husband Tony, who cut the ribbon, and her son Peter, who travelled from from Chichester for the ceremony.

Barbara Chappell, member of Burnham's U3A, said: "Anne was the moving spirit behind the formation of U3A in Burnham in 1999, and its first chairman. She also worked hard for the community in many ways and her death last year was keenly felt."

The bench is located near Riverside Country Park and Burnham Sailing Club. It can be approached by Coronation Road for all to use.

Inspiration

Five members proved an inspiration to us all when, in the summer of 2004, they undertook the St Peter's Way walk. They liked it so much that they wrote a book about it complete with 40 colour photographs.



RAMBLING WRITERS: Beth Greaves, Yvonne Charge, Sheila Nicholson, Thelma Benfield and Barbara Chappell with copies of their book.

Long walk inspires a new book

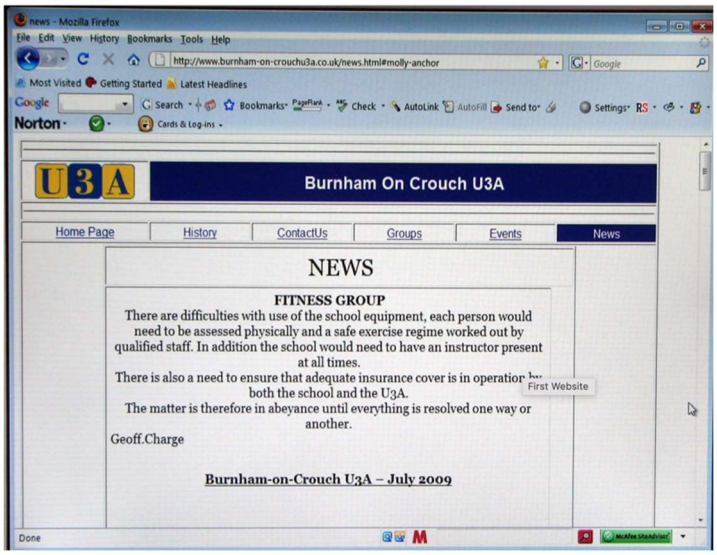
A GROUP of pensioners have completed a 45-mile walk across Essex — and written a book about the experience.

The group, all members of University of the Third Age, completed the St Peter's Way Walk, which runs from Chipping Ongar to St Peter's Chapel in Bradwell. They followed the route in nine stretches between July and September. Four of the group, Beth Greaves, Yvonne Charge, Shelia Nicolson and Thelma Benfield, completed the walk with a fifth member of the group, Barbara Chappell, acting as back-up driver.

Their 20-page illustrated book charts their progress across country, including traversing a long dark tunnel under the railway line near Ingatestone. Anyone interested in a copy of the book can contact Barbara Chappell on 01621 773013.

On the Web

In 2007, we went online, under the auspices of Geoff Charge.



Speakers

Over the years we have listened to many, many speakers. These are usually professional or semi-professional people, although we have been known to draw upon our members' experiences on occasions. Some speakers are so popular that they have been invited back several times.

Among the subjects covered in our first ten years were:

Working in Radio – Homeopathy – A Japanese Living in England – Jack the Ripper – Guide Dogs for the Blind – Antarctica – Witchcraft – Postcards of Burnham – Household Cavalry – Town Crier – RSPB – Desert Governess – Noël Coward – The Tower of London – The Weather – The Theatrical Costumier – Music from the Shows – The Funeral Director – Trading Standards.

Interest Group Leaders/Committee

A branch the size of the Burnham-on-Crouch u3a does not run itself. Tribute should be paid to all the past and present Interest Group leaders for the considerable amount of spare time that they allocate to researching and conducting their meetings. Likewise, the dedication of all the Committee members from 1999 to the present day.

This is a very potted history, and doubtless there are items we should have included but have not, and for that we apologise.

By far the bulk of this material is by ***David Gipson*** *and* ***Peter Finch*** *(August 2009)*