

WHAT'S ON

**9th October – Martin Lloyd -Talk
'Becoming a Famous Author'**

**12th October -Local Visit to E&H
Air Ambulance at Earls Colne.
Now Full**

**23rd October Social Xtra -John
Rosie of Braintree Beekeepers
Assoc. Talk 'Bees & Beekeeping'**

**13th November AGM 2026
Review meeting - followed by
Jacko Jackson talk 'Support our
Paras'**

**26th NOV Day Trip – 'A Day in
Bury St Edmunds for the
Cathedral Christmas Fair'
NOW BOOKING see inside**

**27 November Social Xtra -
Get into the festive mood with
the Colchester ROCK CHOIR**

**11th December – An afternoon
with singer songwriter Danielle
Barnett**

'LIVE LIFE TO THE FULL'

THOUGHTS FROM THE CHAIR

LINDA ANDERSON

Welcome back after our summer break and I hope you all had a lovely summer, whether it was on holiday or spending time with family or simply enjoying the peace and quiet.

I personally enjoy the fact that in the UK we have definite different seasons, although admittedly, they are becoming increasingly out of sync to what we are used to. To be fair, I'm not mad keen on the dark nights, especially after the clocks go back an hour, but that is all part of the seasonal cycle.

But it's nice to see the seasons changing as to me it is a reminder of the circle of life. No matter what happens in our personal lives, the world continues to revolve, the sun still shines and the seasons continue to change. It is our response to the things that happen in our lives that makes the difference.

Our reactions can set the tone for our day, our week or even possibly the rest of our lives. But at the end of the day the only person able to make us happy is ourselves. Happiness is not a destination but a journey, shaped by our thoughts, actions, relationships, and gratitude. As the Dalai Lama said 'Happiness is not something ready-made. It comes from your own actions.'

We need to cultivate a mindset that nurtures joy, resilience, and fulfilment every day. One way to nurture this mindset is by helping others and as members of our u3a, one way of doing this is by becoming one of our beloved volunteers. *The smallest act of kindness can turn a stranger into a friend. (Clara Winthrop)*

I appreciate that I have said this countless times before, but I will continue to say it as we never have enough volunteers. It doesn't matter how much or how little time you have to offer, or that you aren't available regularly etc. Just remember *'As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands; one for helping yourself, the other for helping others.'* (Audrey Hepburn).

By volunteering, you will be helping yourself by socialising, making new friends and feeling that you are part of something, nurturing joy, resilience, and fulfilment. You will also be helping other members in whatever capacity you chose.

Please give it consideration.

Finally, just a reminder that it is our AGM on November 13th. The information about this is included with this newsletter for postal members, and our email members will receive a special emailing by the end of September. Please take time to participate. It is **your** u3a.

"Count your age by friends, not years. Count your life by smiles, not tears."

John Lennon

NEW MEMBERS 2026 TEA & CAKE AFTERNOON

A Tea and Cake afternoon is being arranged for all new members who joined Stanway u3a during 2026. This will be held on Monday 12th October at 2pm in the Tollgate Hall (behind the main Stanway Village Hall), Villa Road, Stanway.

An email will be sent to you all from our Membership Secretary, to invite you to this event, we would be grateful if you would kindly reply to enable us to cater with sufficient refreshments.

It will be an opportunity for you to learn more about our organisation, make enquiries about groups you may wish to join and if you would like to set up a group you will be able to talk to a member of our Group Liaison and Support team to discuss this.

We look forward to meeting you on the day.

Jean Futcher
Vice Chair Stanway u3a.

Stanway u3a Summer Short Story Competition

Doreen Willers - Editor

The Results are in!

The competition closed on 31st August, and it is now time to announce the winner of our Summer Short Story Competition 2026!

We extend a huge *THANK YOU* to everyone who entered and reinforced what we already knew, we have some very talented writers in our midst.

The judges were asked to judge all entries 'blind', i.e. the authors name and membership number were removed from each story before being sent to them. This was to ensure that no one could suggest bias or favouritism.

After days of deliberation, and intense debate, our authors didn't make life easy for the judges, the standard was so high, but finally a decision has been made.

Our Winner is 'The Invisible Woman' by Christine Johnston. Prize £10 Amazon eCard.

We also decided to award Joint Runner-up prizes of a £5 Amazon eCard each to the following members:

'Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds' by Marilyn Summers & *'My Dog Ralph'* by Geoff Carder

You can read the winning entry on page 12 of this newsletter. All stories will be featured in newsletters over the coming months, taking us through to the Spring!

Tom Malcolm in Conversation with....Les Owen



An RAF Chipmunk trainer and rare two-seater trainer English Electric Lightning provided Les with plenty of (different) thrills when he flew in them.

"That was close", thought trainee navigator Les Owen as his Royal Air Force Hercules Transport aircraft came to a halt in front of the terminal building at Gander Airport in Newfoundland, Canada.

He and his crewmates had expected bad conditions on the ground as they made their wintertime approach to what was once the world's largest airport. And they got them.

Not only were they landing in a snowstorm on a runway piled high on either side with "snow mountains" but also a treacherous build-up of ice on the tarmac had turned the taxiway aprons into a skating rink.

So much so that when his pilot touched the brakes of their plane as they approached their allocated gate nothing happened! Nothing except the terminal building

was getting closer and closer. No matter how hard and how many times the brakes were applied, it was still getting closer!

Just as the crew members were bracing themselves for impact, the Hercules came to a halt. Only six feet away from making a less than distinguished entry into Gander's fine building.

No wonder Les remembers the incident so vividly, even although it happened over 50 years ago.

"It may seem daft now to be landing in such awful conditions but back then we had no choice," as Les explains. "We were at the halfway point of our journey across the Atlantic Ocean when Gander advised us to divert to a different airport. But the awful weather extended well beyond Gander and Canada; there was no other suitable airfield open to go to, and our fuel situation meant we had to stick to our original flight plan. Luckily it ended up ok."



This wartime photo of Winston Churchill is believed to have been taken at a North African airfield when Les's father Vic was serving there during the Second World War.

Having signed up on a long-term commission, the RAF put Les through Liverpool University where he studied geography and geology. But fate stepped in when romance blossomed between Les and fellow Liverpool Uni student Lisa. After much consideration Les obtained a discharge from the RAF and he and Lisa settled down together as man and wife in civvy street.

It was the knowledge that his dad had served with the RAF in the Second World War that possibly, when added to a love of flying, sowed the seed in Les's head of joining up himself. His dad Vic was, in Les's words, "an ordinary airman on RAF airfield protection duties." But other than telling his son that he was scared at times, there were no other details offered about his military service.

That was until many years after the war finished when Les turned up wartime photographs of his dad, together with some of his RAF chums, at a military facility in North Africa. And in one of the photographs was a very familiar figure. None other than Prime Minister Winston Churchill who was visiting the airfield where the lads were stationed.

It was an astonishing discovery but his dad, like many of his generation who saw active service, had not talked about Churchill's visit or his other wartime experiences in detail.

"I respect my dad's decision to keep a lot of those memories to himself but at the same time it made me determined to do the complete opposite for my own children, Matt and Kate."



Les today with a copy of the book he wrote

One thing led to another and, with the assistance of a friend who worked at the publishing house, Les saw his *book 'A lifetime thus far – so much more still to do'* was printed in the 1990s.

There was plenty of material for sure.

Les was born in the then St. George's Hospital at Hyde Park Corner in London. Today it is a swanky hotel. His parents lived in Forest Gate in the east end of London, but when Les was eight years of age the family moved up to Cockermouth in what is now Cumbria. Les's dad was a production manager for a firm in nearby Maryport and Les lived in Cockermouth until he moved to Liverpool University after joining the RAF.

Like father like son, when he left the RAF Les was appointed production manager for a firm in Llangollen, North Wales. He and his family stayed there for four years before they moved back to the London area and a post running a group of car repair and body shop businesses.



A younger Les when serving with the Met at Hornchurch

One day Les totally "stunned" his wife when he told her he had been successful in his application to join the Metropolitan Police. "In those days you joined at the very bottom of the ladder. I was a probationer constable, based in Croydon. Joining the police was something I had wanted to do for some time, and I was delighted to get this opportunity."

He rose steadily through the ranks. Still in his early 50s, Les was now a Chief Inspector, and he found himself seconded to the Home Office working as staff officer to Sir David O'Doud, who was in charge of the Inspectorate of Constabulary. "A driven man," says Les. "On one occasion when walking with him to his car he was busy telling me all the things I had to be doing while he was away. Suddenly he peels off and heads to a nearby lavatory, so I stopped and waited. Only to hear him bawl out my name. He had more to tell me and nothing – but nothing – was going to stop him!"

Retirement from the Met at 55 was not such a difficult decision for Les as he, by now, had one or two health concerns. "My GP was also a police forensic doctor, and he advised that if I carried on working so hard the high blood pressure I was experiencing could result in heart problems, maybe even a stroke. He was right, but these things only happened years later."

He set up as a consultant, initially advising transport firms on safety-related initiatives. Then his police experience came to the fore and he found himself travelling the world advising police forces on how to deal with critical incidents, natural disasters and other catastrophic occurrences.

"I visited Uganda, Surinam, Kuwait and Mauritius among other places but then Covid brought a halt to everything. Firstly, I couldn't fly anywhere and secondly because the company which produced the operating software we used was Chinese, it was banned by the United States and United Kingdom governments for fear the system could be a threat to national security. That really killed the whole initiative."

Never one to let the grass grow under his feet, Les volunteered as a First Responder for the Bucks ambulance service and in the five years or so he did that job is proud to say that he must have taught upwards of 2,500 adults and children how to do CPR – a potentially life-saving skill which soon might find its way onto the National Curriculum for schoolchildren.

Les sold up his cottage in Buckinghamshire and moved to his new-build home in Eight Ash Green a few years ago so that he can be closer to his son and his family who live in Billericay.

After making good recoveries from his health issues which followed, Les joined Stanway u3a and is an active member of the ten-pin bowling and pétanque groups. He also likes going out into the nearby countryside for long walks and visiting the gym once or twice a week.

"I really enjoy my u3a activities not only because they have brought me into contact with really nice, like-minded people but they also help keep me active and feeling as fit as I do."

And then the conversation returns to his book with its intriguing title *'A lifetime thus far – so much more still to do'*

Is he thinking of a second volume?

"So much more has happened in my life since it was published all those years ago"

And like any good author, he leaves it hanging there!

SPEAKERS CORNER

Linda Anderson Speakers & Publicity Secretary

Hello Ladies and Gentlemen,

It was lovely seeing all 111 of you at our first monthly meeting after our summer break.



The speaker we had for our meeting was a lady called Christine Webber. Some of you may have recognised her from when she was a news presenter for Anglia TV.

Christine has had a varied career which included; training as a singer at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama; Musical theatre; news presenter on tv; freelance TV; health journalist; an agony aunt for various publications and a psychotherapist.

Christine is now 79 herself and is passionate about encouraging people to make changes that will help their health and longevity.

Her talk Positive Aging covered a range topics that can help people of a certain age to maximise their chances of staying as fit as possible for as long as possible.

Some of her hints, tips and suggestions were informative, helpful and straightforward. Her main message was, to get out and socialise and exercise more.

Thank you, Christine, for a great afternoon.

I know that you enjoy speaking to u3as and that you have the highest regard for the organisation.

Friday 9th October at 2pm Stanway Village Hall (doors open 1.30pm)

Martin Lloyd Talk – ‘Becoming a Famous Author’

Browse our book and puzzle stall.

Join us for Tea, Coffee & Biscuits and chat to friends after the talk.

Admission & refreshments free!



Martin is an experienced and popular speaker. He last visited Stanway in 2019, when he gave us, an excellent talk called Passports, Assassins, Traitors and Spies.

He continues to travel throughout the country giving talks to all kinds of groups and associations and this occasion his talk is called Becoming a Famous Author.

Discover the truth about writers, publishers and bookshops. In a step-by-step exposé you will learn what I had to do to get my first book published. Prepare to be shocked, entertained, amazed and amused.

Colchester u3a Monthly Meetings

Highwoods Community Centre 1:45pm Wednesdays (talks start at 2:00pm)

21 October – Talk ‘The Jumbo Project’ Irene Kettle

THE SOCIAL SQUAD

News from the Social Sub-Committee

Social Xtra Afternoon

Friday 23rd October at 2pm Stanway Village Hall (doors open 1.30pm)

John Rosie with an illustrated talk on ‘Bees & Beekeeping’

Join us for Tea, Coffee & Biscuits and chat to friends after the talk.

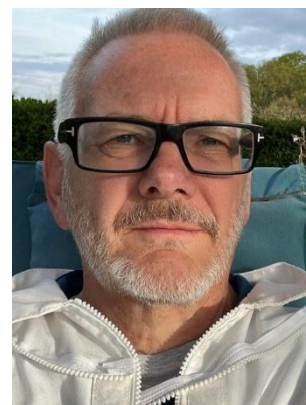
Admission & refreshments free!



Our guest speaker for our October Socia Xtra is John Rosie of the Braintree Beekeepers Association.

John is an enthusiastic hobbyist beekeeper. We are increasingly aware of the importance of Bees, but a British Beekeepers initiative is now actively encouraging schools and community groups, like us to become more bee friendly and aware of the importance of all pollinators. Essentially, become 'friends of the honeybee'.

The talk will be illustrated with slides and video clips, and John is happy to take questions both during and after the talk.



STANWAY u3a DAY TRIPS

Doreen Willers Trips Co-Ordinator

Thursday 26th November A Day in Bury St Edmunds for the Cathedral Christmas Fair



We still have seats available for this trip. Price £18 each member full details in August and September newsletters.

Parking available at the hotel in Marks Tey at £6 per car payable in cash on the day (car reg required at time of booking)

Open to Stanway and Colchester members.

We have received several requests to pay by bank transfer. Payment details:

Sort Code 08-92-99 A/C 65691441 Payee: Stanway u3a – NO 3 ACC

Ref: Your Surname/Bury Please ensure you quote this so that we can properly identify your remittance

Please email stanwayu3atrips@gmail.com to confirm you have arranged remittance

Please complete the online booking form by following this link <https://forms.gle/qG3dLy1vj2HVMcj6>

We can only confirm your booking once form and full payment received. Thank you

Or to pay by cheque pick up a booking form at the Monthly meeting. If you have any questions, please email me on the above address or call me on 01206 330300.

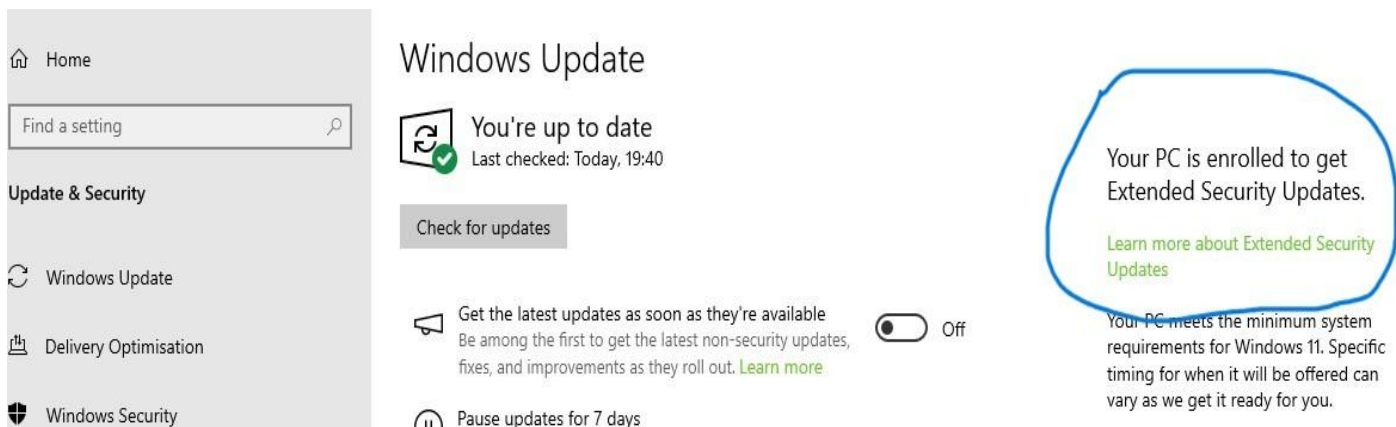


September 2026 Tech Update

Windows 10 Extended Support

As a reminder for those members with a PC/Laptop running Windows 10 operating system, it is no longer supported by Microsoft and will not receive any “feature” or security updates from Microsoft.

However, Microsoft does offer a limited Extended Security Updates (ESU) programme that will provide security updates for Windows 10 until **12 October 2027**, providing you have registered.



Without this protection you run the risk of your Windows 10 PC/laptop being exposed to vulnerabilities which could result in any of a number of unwanted scenarios - hacking, introduction of malware and ransomware, identity theft, data loss or financial loss.

If you are still running Windows 10 and haven't registered, please take the time to do this now.

Go to your Settings, Update and Security and on the right, you should see a notice on the page inviting you to register, or a confirmation if you are already registered:

Registration is free if you don't mind backing up your PC settings to Microsoft, or you can elect to pay a one-off fee and bypass this condition. Note: backing up your settings and files will make it less likely you will lose anything if your computer dies on you.

Detailed information about the ESU programme can be found here (copy and paste the web address into your web browser):

<https://www.microsoft.com/en-gb/windows/extended-security-updates?r=1>

Registering will give you another year to make a decision on moving to Windows 11, or purchasing a new PC/laptop with Windows 11 already installed if your current one cannot be upgraded.

Stay safe

Alec Anderson, Tech Support

Needles n' Pins Group

2 vacancies now available

Group Leader Margaret Meen writes: Our Needles and Pins Group started life as taster sessions during the winter months but proved to be so popular that it soon became a fully-fledged group. We meet on the 1st & 3rd Tuesday afternoons each month 2 to 4pm in the Committee Room in Stanway Community Centre, Villa Road, Stanway.

We have people teaching crochet to beginners, showing how to knit fair-isle and colour block, and learning to read patterns. Some are doing cross stitching and patchwork. We are also making knitted/ crochet teddies and are looking at making tiny hats for prem babies.

We're a very sociable group who help and encourage each other while enjoying a nice cup of tea and a good natter.

If you are interested in joining us or have any questions, please contact Margaret via the Groups page on our website: [Needles and Pins - Stanway in Colchester](#) or speak to her at the next Monthly Meeting, you will find her managing the Book & Puzzle stall.

The following groups have new Group Leaders.

Bookworms

Our popular fiction book evening group was started by Eileen Florence and has flourished for several years. However, Eileen has decided to step down as Group Leader, and we thank her for her commitment in making this group so popular. Eileen is handing the reins to Jennefer Lee, they will continue to meet as usual in the evening of the last Thursday each month, but the venue will change to the Chitts Hill area. We wish Jennefer continued success.

If you are interested in finding out more about this group, you can contact Jennefer through the groups page on our website: [Bookworm - Stanway in Colchester](#)

Bolivia

Our Bolivia group also has a new Group Leader; Beverley Mathews has taken over the role as Barbara Scandell has moved away. We wish Barbara every happiness in her new home. For more information and to contact Beverley please visit the Groups page: [Canasta \(Bolivia\) - Stanway in Colchester](#)

Stanway u3a Golf Group

Late Summer Charity Golf Competition

The Golf Group held their Late Summer Charity Competition at Birch Grove Golf Club on Monday 7th September. Twenty-two players contested for the Bob Keen Trophy, held in memory of our dear friend, Bob. The Competition was held to raise funds for Motor Neuron Disease, the disease from which Bob suffered.

The Competition was played in brilliant sunshine but after many weeks without rain the hard ground made conditions difficult. However, in a very close contest Caroline Spencer overcame these to claim the trophy with a score of 28.5 net. Second was Alan Blois on 29 followed by Jan Blackmore on 31. Prizes were presented by John Allen, our Events Organiser.



Thanks were extended to Birch Grove Golf Club for hosting the event and for providing players with a welcome breakfast bap on return to the clubhouse. John was thanked for organising the competition Christine and Ralph for running the raffle and all who donated prizes for the raffle.

Through players contributions, donations and the raffle the group raised the fantastic sum of £539 for MNDA.

Thanks to everyone who contributed to making this a most successful and enjoyable day.

Colin Hawkins
Group Leader

For more information about Stanway u3a Golf and to contact Colin, please visit the Groups page on our website:
[Golf - Stanway in Colchester](#)

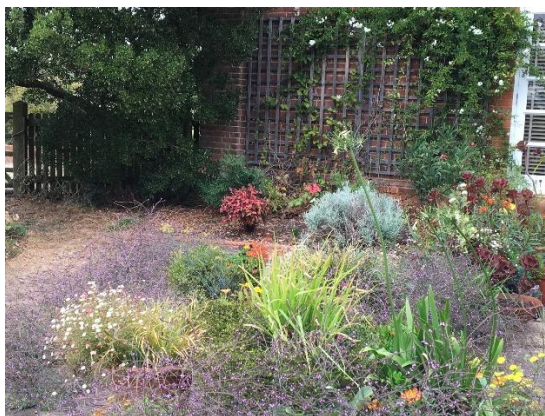
U3A Stanway's garden groups visit to Oak Farm, Wakes Colne, Colchester, September 4th

Oak Farm has been owned by the Chillingworth family for almost 100 years. The informal farmhouse garden of about an acre, has been designed to make the most of stunning views across the Colne Valley to the south and west, whilst the listed house and farmyard frame it to the north.



The site is very exposed with gravelly soil, so Peter and Ann Chillingworth, the current owners, are facing more problems than many others in the currently lengthy drought conditions.

Nevertheless, as we wandered round admiring the views, following and introductory talk by Peter, it was good to see that so many plants had survived, having benefitted from careful planting over the years.



In the prairie garden, bushes and grasses sheltered the lower border plants, while all around the numerous walkways, salvias, nandinas, Michaelmas daisies, zauschnerias, rudbeckia, lavender, iceplants, just breaking into flower, and a solanum growing against the farmhouse wall, provided splashes of cheerful colour.



Towards the end of this September visit, 23 members of the combined Stanway U3A garden groups, led by Lindsay Grieg-Smith, made our way back to the farmhouse, where our hosts served us drinks and a selection of delicious homemade cakes, baked by Ann. It was the perfect end to a most enjoyable afternoon.

Thank you, Lindsay, for organising it. (Barbara May – a member of U3A 'Garden Explorers')

Ladies & gentlemen, we are delighted to bring you the winning entry of our 2026 Summer Short Story Competition.

The Invisible Woman by Christine Johnston

When I began to become invisible it came as quite a surprise
when people started talking over my head to avoid looking into my eyes.
So I went to visit my doctor, who was sitting at his screen with bowed head
“Good morning, Miss Trinovanti. How can I help you?” he said.

“Oh, doctor I’m actually feeling very good. There’s just a slight worry for me
that lately I seem to be suffering a lot from chronic invisibility.
No doors are opened for me anymore and I’m pushed out of every queue
and young assistants in shops make me wait whilst they discuss a thing called UTube.”

“And when I try to cross the road drivers seem to scowl and frown.
I’m sure they speed up deliberately. Are they trying to knock me down?”
The doctor doesn’t stop typing and scrutinises his screen with a sigh
“Well, unless it’s bacterial or viral, I’m a bit flummoxed,” he replied.

“I can give you these nice strong pills for depression – everyone takes them now, you know.
Why don’t I give you six months’ supply and then we’ll see how you go?”
“But doctor, I don’t think I’m depressed,” I replied, “I don’t want to go that way.
It’s simply that I’ve become invisible and no one listens to what I say.”

I feel I want to tell him I went to Oxford, got a First in PPE,
and was headhunted by the Civil Service – ran a huge department for HM Treasury.
My job was very high profile; I wore expensive suits and had immaculate hair.
My only vice was the odd glass of red and a weakness for La Perla underwear.

But he’s already printed the pale green script and hands it to me with a smile,
“Try to keep busy Miss Trinovanti, get a cat and don’t think of yourself all the while.”
I leave and walk past the receptionist’s desk and politely say goodbye
But she’s busy and perhaps didn’t hear me. She certainly didn’t reply.

I go and see my group of friends; we meet twice a week, sometimes three,
And we sit and put the world to rights, discuss thinning hair and the woeful state of our teeth.
There’s Rose, with chronic arthritis and a husband with COPD
who collects her grandchildren from school every day and takes them home for their tea.

There’s Myra who well over 80 (we think) and drives an old S Type Jag
She has to shop in Aldi now (but always uses her Waitrose bags)
“Look at that David Attenborough,” she complains, “Why he looks 103,
and all the world hangs on to his words – wish people would listen like that to me!”

They ask how I got on at the doctor’s and bestow their support in full
“there’s no point in struggling against it, my dear; unfortunately, it’s inevitable.
We have to accept that as we get older, we become invisible.”

POSTCARDS FROM AMOS

Hello Essex, this is Amos speaking to you from Cornwall. I'm well settled in now, back in my homeland; but I ain't forgot you lot back there in Stanway, and I'll be sending you a postcard now and again to let you know how I'm gettin' on and giving you a few gardening tips, plus some amusing (I hope) stories and anecdotes.

I know you've been in the hottest and driest region in the country this year and you've all got lovely beige lawns. The only good thing about that in my case – yes, my lawn is beige too – is that the grass matches my new beige shorts. Like you we've also had a hosepipe ban, and with the hose all curled up away cosy in the shed, carrying can after can of water down the garden ain't bin much fun. It's a back-breaking chore and I'm certain my right arm is a bit longer than my left now. Let's hope by the time you read this you've had a decent amount of rain, and your lawn has woken up. As you know the grass always comes back again. Like some of us older gardeners it's tough as old boots.

I'm sure many of you have lost some plants especially annual bedding that couldn't get their roots down deep enough to have a good drink. Losing perennials and even in some cases shrubs is a more serious business, and replacements can be expensive. So, with this in mind we've gotta think about moving things to different places in the garden or replacing some of them. Take a good look around and note what's done well and what hasn't.

Now if them clever climate change experts have got it right and we're gonna have these long hot dry periods in the future, we must definitely make changes. Well, we can't change the soil, and we can't change the aspect of our garden, but we can introduce different drought-tolerant plants that love the hot sunny conditions, and we can create shade by various means. We can't change all the soil, but if we have thin well drained earth, we can fool some plants that are not fond of that by creating pockets of rich composted soil to plant them in and giving them a bit of extra TLC. Yeah, a lot to think about if you're not an experienced gardener but I can help you out in more detail in my future articles.

If you decide to move any perennials to a more suitable position in the garden it's wise to do it now rather than in the Spring, to give them more time to get their roots down before the next hot dry Summer. But you'd better get goin', you need to do it preferably before the end of October while the ground is still relatively warm. So, boots on! And always remember best plan is right plant in right place.

I'll leave you with this:

*DON'T COMPLAIN BECAUSE
ROSE BUSHES HAVE THORNS
BUT REJOICE BECAUSE
THORN BUSHES HAVE ROSES*
Abraham Lincoln

Bye to you all and take care now

Amos



Oct 24th @ 14.30 & Oct 25th @ 16.30 Headgate Theatre Rehearsal Room

(God) Help The Aged

Written & Produced by Stanway u3a member Carrie Ransom

This light-hearted 50-minute comedy play looks at the ageing process. It encompasses mature people dealing with new technology and reminiscing about the good old days.

Warning: Contents will make you laugh!

Here's the direct link to buy the tickets <https://colchester.ssboxoffice.com/events/?/godhelptheaged>

. Our Swiss Holiday Adventures 2026 – Part 1

By Linda & Alec Anderson

I have always enjoyed travelling by train, so when the issue of our summer holidays for this year came up, we decided that we would try the Great Rail Journeys, Glacier Express.

The itinerary sounded reasonable, not like other touring holidays we've had when our luggage needed to be outside the bedroom door by 6.00am and us on the coach by 7.00.

St Pancras – Paris – Strasbourg – Basel - Chur – Brig

Brig – Geneve – Paris – St Pancras.

The holiday was nine days, but day 1 and day 9 were travelling days. I am not going to bore you with accounts of our everyday activities, but just a flavour of our experience.



There was to be 28 of us, including the tour manager, but a couple who chose to travel to London on the morning of departure and got caught in one of a number of train derailments that occurred around that weekend and missed the train. (Fortunately, they were able to catch up with us later that same evening).

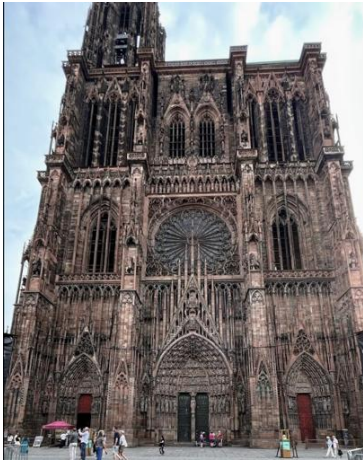
Although we have been on the Eurostar and Le Shuttle before, it has been quite a while since we were last at St Pancras. I hardly recognised it. It sounded very cosmopolitan with all the different languages we could hear as people were milling about.

It felt strange going through passport control and still having our luggage. When you fly you are only left with your carry-ons.

We had designated seats in the Eurostar Plus carriages (they used to be called 1st class). The journey just whizzed past as everyone was talking with their travelling companions to get to know a little bit about them. I have to confess that I hadn't realised that we had gone through the tunnel until someone mentioned it.

There are 66 million people who live in the UK and of that number 28 were on the tour with us. Even so, one of the other female passengers was a pickleball player, like me!!!

Following our arrival at Gare du Nord, we walked to Gare de l'Est to get our train to Strasbourg, where we would spend our first night. It is a historic Alsatian city, with grand squares and narrow waterways, blending both French and German architectural influences, with the picturesque centre dominated by the Gothic cathedral dating from the 13th century. Also, just across the road from our hotel was an area known as La Petite France. During the Middle Ages it was home to tanners, millers and fishermen, it is now a UNESCO World Heritage site of cobbled streets, flower-lined canals and half-timbered houses.



Left Strasbourg Cathedral

Right La Petite France



The following morning, we caught the train to Basel where we joined the Swiss rail network and where we would change trains for our destination of Chur (Cur). We witnessed the scenery quickly increasing in beauty and altitude. From the gentle shoreline of Lake Zurich, the Swiss Alps began to surround our route as the landscape became more dramatic.

Chur is the capital of the Canton of Graubünden and is considered to be the oldest settlement in Switzerland, having been populated for over 5000 years. It has cobbled alleys, courtyards and colourful townhouses. The cathedral was built between 1151 and 1272 in the Romanesque/Gothic style. There is also an 8th century church (St Martin's) with a distinctive spire and clock face. Close by is Arcas, a medieval square with houses built into the city walls.



Arcas Square, Chur

We quickly settled into our 360-year-old hotel to spend the first of three nights and the following day we took the cable car up Brambrüesch mountain to really appreciate the fantastic views. We had lunch at one of the two restaurants at the top and ended up talking to a couple from Derbyshire!!

The two highlights of the trip were the train journeys on the Bernina Express and the Glacier Express.

Dubbed the rail experts' best-kept secret, the Bernina Express panoramic carriage windows gave us amazing views of the UNESCO-listed route, with its twists and spirals as it made its way south through the rugged landscape of the Engadine Valley, across the curved Landwasser Viaduct and looping through tunnels as it climbed the Albula Line. After reaching the summit at more than 7,300 feet above sea level, we passed the turquoise waters of Lago Bianco before crossing the Bernina Pass. We briefly stopped to view the spectacular Palü Glacier beside the tracks at Alp Grüm, we then wound our way down to the Italian-speaking town of Poschiavo.

Poschiavo is a compact alpine town lined with pastel-coloured buildings, with pale blue, pink and yellow buildings surround the pretty Piazza Comunale.

On the return journey, we called briefly into the resort of St Moritz for photography opportunities around the lake.

The second train journey highlight was on the Glacier Express one of Europe's most iconic train journeys which took us to Brig and our second hotel.

The scenic route of the 'slowest express train in the world' included the Rhine Gorge, where panoramic carriage windows provide front-row seats to the 'Swiss Grand Canyon', as it travelled at an average speed of 24mph.

As we rose above the valley floor, passing serene lakes and snowy peaks we climbed towards Andermatt. After completing the journey through the nine-mile Furka Tunnel, we followed the Rhône to the valley town of Brig, nestled beside the river at the northern edge of the Simplon tunnel.

Whenever anyone is asked what do they think of when they think of Switzerland, a lot of them will say; chocolate, cheese, watches and the Matterhorn, not necessarily in that order.

After settling into our hotel, the following day we travelled by local train to the idyllic mountain resort of Zermatt, located at the foot of the mighty Matterhorn. We had past lush wildflower meadows, dense alpine forests and thundering waterfalls of the Matter Valley on the way. Zermatt is only accessible on foot or by train, so the tranquillity is immediately striking.



Above: The Majestic Matterhorn



Some of the old houses in Zermatt where mountaineers start their climb of the Matterhorn

The second part of Linda and Alec's journey will be in the next issue of u3a Stanway News

If you have something you think other members would enjoy, a poem, story or tell us about an interesting hobby or something you are passionate about please share it with us.

Please send contributions for inclusion in the NOVEMBER newsletter to the editor at email: u3agen57@gmail.com by latest 15th OCTOBER(earlier if possible).

Any contribution should be in *Word* and photos/illustrations sent as jpeg. THANK YOU