



# u3a

## Halesworth and District Newsletter - September 2025



## All Steamed Up!



This summer has been a dream time for 'Railway Anoraks' in East Anglia. During August, the 'Railway 200' exhibition visited Norwich Station for several days before moving on to Lowestoft. The exhibition comprised several carriages with static and interactivity displays, housed in old rolling stock from Greater Anglia, which traced the history of our railway since the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway. On September 27th 1825, Stephenson's Rocket made history by carrying 450 people in open carriages at a speed of 15 miles an hour between Darlington and Stockton and as they say 'the rest is history'. The subsequent development was at huge cost in terms of lives lost. The 'navvies' as they were known, suffered extreme hardship and appalling casualties in the construction of tunnels, embankments and viaducts.



Source - Britannica



'Rail 200' Exhibition' in Norwich Station



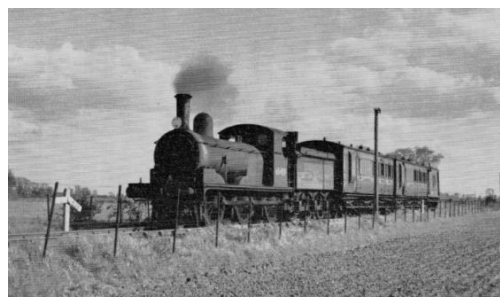
Source - National Railway Museum

Not to be outdone, the Southwold Railway Trust is holding no less than fifteen open days at its centre at what was Blythburgh Station, almost midway on the nearly nine miles of track, which took passengers from Halesworth on the Great Eastern Railway to Southwold using a three-foot gauge, sadly closed in 1929.

For up-to-date information visit: <https://www.southwoldrailway.co.uk>



The track Extension - MSLR 2025



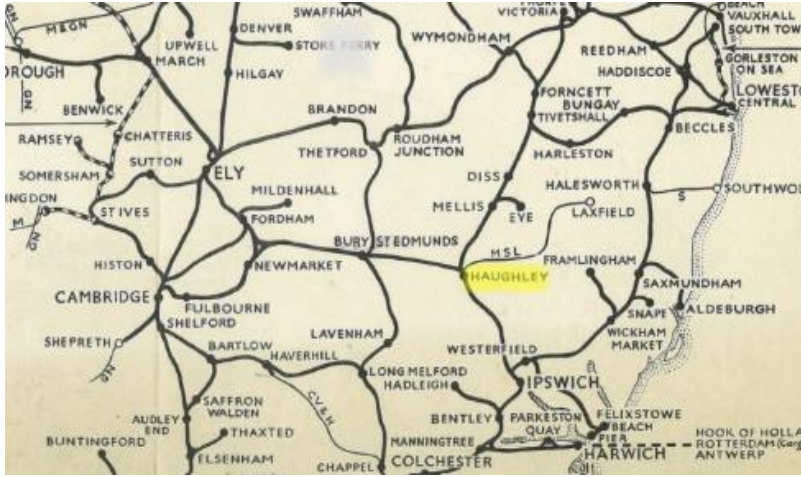
Mid Suffolk Light Railway in 1951



Michael Portillo seen on the MSLR

Perhaps a little less well known is the history of the other rail enterprise which was intended to join the Norwich main line at Haughley Junction to Halesworth. It began its life as a goods line using the Light Railways Act of 1896, which allowed a railway to be constructed with a faster planning process and to a lower technical standard. For a start there were no crossing keepers so the guard took on that role and the rolling stock was definitely 'second hand! The line opened in September 1904 and initially ran as far as Cratfield. The financial situation was always precarious as the amount of goods carried on the line did not cover the costs. By the turn of the century, motorised goods vehicles were beginning to appear as cheaper, more adaptable and faster competition.

Passenger services eventually started in September 1908. Just four years later in February 1912, it was decided to suspend traffic on the section from Laxfield to Cratfield, as income on the section was very poor. In 1914 the track between Laxfield and Cratfield was lifted for war use and never replaced. This left the line with just 19 miles of track, ending in the village of Laxfield and dubbed 'The railway to nowhere!'



East Anglian Railway Network Map - 1921

Had it not been for the Second World War, it would have been closed earlier, but it was useful to supply goods and armaments to the host of airfields that sprung up in this area.

When the war ended, the line struggled on for a few more years until July 1952 when a train left Laxfield for the very last time.

That might have been the end of the story but due to the hard work and enthusiasm of a group of railway enthusiasts a section of the line at Brockford Station has been reinstated. It has retained the atmosphere

of this odd line, recreated with the original station buildings and originally with just a quarter of a mile of track. This summer an additional quarter of a mile has been added. No wonder 'The Middy' as it was affectionally called has won prestigious awards including 'Suffolk Museum of the Year' and is the only standard gauge heritage railway line in Suffolk. Information and open days: <https://www.mslr.org.uk/>

## Update from your Chairwoman

September brings two important activities for our u3a. Firstly it's time to renew our membership. I hope that you have enjoyed being part of the u3a this year and that you will continue your membership into 2026. This year we are asking everyone to fill in a renewal form because we are hoping that many members will **tick the Gift Aid box** for this year and future years. If enough members subscribe, **Gift Aid** will supplement membership income which will help to keep our fee to an affordable amount and possibly supplement a few more activities and outings.

We are also preparing for our AGM which takes place on 21st October. You should have received notification of the AGM and also a nomination form for you to use when nominating committee members. The Agenda and final papers will be sent out later this month. **Please consider whom you might nominate to join the committee.**

We have twelve committee posts including three officer roles. At present we have several vacancies due to retirements and health problems and we need more volunteers to ensure the future of our lovely u3a. Succession planning is a perpetual problem but without a core of volunteers committed to keeping the u3a alive, then the vital organisation will fade away. **This has already happened to a nearby u3a and I am sure no one wants our u3a close.**

Committee work is not to everyone's taste. However there are plenty of practical jobs which might be carried out without the need to be a committee member. In particular we need several people who enjoy using and managing simple IT systems. So if you have an interest in IT and IT admin, please get in touch. If we are to attract new, younger members, we need to have more presence on social media. If you enjoy using Facebook and possibly also Instagram, could you be the person who might help us? All genuine offers welcomed, so please contact me via the website at: <https://halesworth.u3asite.uk/contact/>.

**The Art Appreciation** group is an informal meeting, discussing a range of topics, themes, movements and artists. Each topic is selected by the group as a whole for individual research with a presentation of findings, followed by discussion. It is not an Art History lecture. Members are invited to volunteer their findings but it is also perfectly acceptable to just come along to listen. There is no pressure. The group meets every month on the second Tuesday between 10.00am and 12.00 noon at the the Coop Community Room. Currently there are about twelve members.



In July the group went on a pre booked guided visit to view the art collection at the Red House, Aldeburgh and the September meeting will be reflections on that as a follow up. No pre- knowledge is required. As the community room is not available to us for the October meeting, it is proposed that the meeting will be a visit to Gainsborough's House, Sudbury, Suffolk. The exhibition is, 'Masterpieces from Kenwood: The Splendour of British and French Painting'. We have 3 - 4 cars available for shared transport. Admission is £16.50 Come along to a meeting to see if it's for you.



**The band at the Huntingfield Music Festival**

**Ukulele Group.** We have had a wonderful summer. We went to the Heveningham Hall Country Fair, at the end of June, playing three sets each day. The weather was glorious and despite the whole band being over 65 years old, with at least three in their mid-80's, we all managed to keep cool! August has been a busy month as we have just played at the Framlingham Country Show, and are now rehearsing for the 1st Huntingfield Music Festival. One of our band is organising all the music performances, so we want to do an extra special performance for her.

Last week our co-ordinator, Chris, answered a telephone number he did not recognise, and quickly found himself doing a live interview on BBC Radio Suffolk, which was our second live interview in the past twelve months. Chris was asked what was the best way of learning to play. He was able to give a useful plug to the U3A and how helpful it is to belong to a group and learn together. Incidentally, the music used as a link on the programme was by George Formby, but what is usually forgotten is how musicians like the Beatles, Brian May, Neil Young, David Bowie and numerous other Pop and Rock royalty used the ukulele to play and for composition, so we feel we are in good company.

Please visit our Facebook page. This month's profile features Mike, a brilliant musician who is 94 in November. Although he no longer takes part when we are performing at events, he is very much a member of the band, rarely missing a week's session, and is always there to remind us of when it is coffee time!



**Coffee Break in The Angel**

**The Local History Group** enjoyed a summer social at the beautiful Bank House and is now heavily involved in Heritage Open Days 12th - 20th September. We are also running a History and Family History Hub prior to the Open Days at I-Chameleon in the Thoroughfare from 4th to 10th September. We have developed a new Quay Street Walk exploring the town's industrial past, laced with plenty of fascinating social history and architectural interest. This walk is on 12th September at 11am, starting at Halesworth Museum.

We are preparing items to be published on lesser-known Halesworth figures and developing our interactive history map which will be showcased at 'The Magickal Emporium' at 1 Marketplace on 12th September. It's a drop-in session to see 'work-in-progress' on building the 'Halesworth History Map', showing the relationships between the people of this Suffolk market town, their life events, where they lived and worked and the businesses in which they traded. For further information on the forthcoming Heritage Days:

<https://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/whats-on/search-2025-events.html?view=list&sortBy=&searchQuery=&locationQuery=halesworth&distance=5&startDate=&endDate=>

**The Canasta Group** meets every Tuesday from 10.30 to 12.30 at the Cut. However, we meet around 10.15 so we can have coffee. Sometimes, some members have lunch together and attend the first Tuesday of the Month U3A Film and the third Tuesday talk. We have 18 members and most weeks 10-14 members assemble. We play in groups of 4 (ideal) or groups of 3. Canasta is a game that can be played as an individual in groups of 3 or as a partner in groups of 4. Good for the memory too. We have a few very experienced players but most are developing their skills. Come and give the group a trial. Contact us on our u3a website.



**The Music Appreciation Group** enters its eleventh year, still with some of its original members and is welcoming four new members, with one joining us from Norwich, as we start the new u3a year. We meet on the fourth Thursday morning in the library from 10.30 to 12.00 noon. The cost is £2.00 a session, We have just held our planning meeting and the new programme for the year will be on our website shortly. The programme to Christmas is:

**25th September** Brahms and his amazing chamber works

**23rd October** New members' musical choice

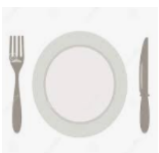
**27th November** Whose Music Shaped the Beatles?

**18th December (earlier date)** Christmas Meal at The Low House, Laxfield

We welcome potential new members for a free taster session.



**Lunch on Friday Group** The group has visited the The Kings Head, Yoxford, The Sail Loft in Southwold and The Huntingfield Arms. Thanks to Mike for organising the August lunch. September is at The Racehorse at Westhall



**NB: Friday coffee hour - 26th September at 11.00am in the Cut Café, Halesworth**



Green Sandpiper



Woodlark



Bittern



Kingfisher

### Bird watching group

A return visit in June to SWT Martlesham Wilds, organised by Martin, to see the development of the site as they let nature take its course. It was interesting to see how much had changed. We were ably guided by Jeanette and Alison and spotted thirty nine species of birds. The highlight of the walk was the Woodlark singing perched on a post, although five other species were new to the list for this year - Sparrowhawk, Swift, Stock Dove, Jay and Green Woodpecker.

July saw us visit a new site for the group, Pound Farm, near Rendham, managed by The Woodland Trust. It is a delightful place with trees, meadows and ponds to ensure a variety of habitat and species. Twenty one species of birds were heard singing or seen, eight butterflies, several interesting wild flowers, including a Pyramid Orchid, a Great-crested Newt in one of the ponds and a very quick sighting of a Roe Deer. Thanks to Martin for organising the visit.

Our August meeting was at RSPB Abbey Farm, with thanks to Graham for taking us round this special site. In all forty two bird species were recorded including Bittern and Kingfisher, but also twelve butterfly species and eight dragonfly / damselfly species, a Pantaloon Bee and a Great-green Bush Cricket.

There were eight species new for the group this year including Greenshank and Green Sandpiper.

All the lists can be found on the website [Bird Watching Group - Species Seen - Halesworth and District](#)

**The Science Group's** last meeting was entitled '*Environmentally Friendly Fracking*' continuing one of our themes for this year - energy production. This follows the very successful Sizewell B tour in July. Thanks to The Hoppa and driver for transporting most of the participants.

In September we have our annual planning meeting, where the group members decide what topics will be covered in 2026. Suggesting the subject does not commit the member to giving the talk! This year we're supplementing the planning meeting with two short talks based around animal evolution. The first '*How vertebrates arose*', was a somewhat prescient choice since a couple of months ago, Ben Garrod presented a programme on bones on BBC 4. The second of our short talks is on '*Warm-Bloodedness*' a characteristic of some vertebrates (birds and mammals) but not all (fish, amphibians and reptiles) In October we have two speakers tackling different aspects of "space" – under the title "The Moon and Beyond". This ties in with our meeting at the beginning of the year where we visited the DASH ASTRO Dark Skies Group.



Our last talk of the year (November) is titled "Is nobody irreplaceable" and deals with prosthetics, which is a branch of medicine and engineering that deals with the design, creation, and fitting of artificial devices to replace missing or damaged body parts. Speaking personally, I have a tooth implant, plastic lenses and a metal hip, so part way to being bionic!



We meet in the library at 2.00 pm on the 4th Thursday of the month. New members are always welcome. See the Groups' Page on our u3a website.

On Saturday morning I was listening to LBC radio. The theme of the programme was retirement and particularly why men seemed ill-prepared for retirement and seemed at a loss when they did retire. I have to say that some of the callers seemed puzzled and unhappy about this apparent situation, it also annoyed me. So I messaged the station saying I was very happily recently retired and it was not hard to achieve that. They rang me back and asked if I would share my views live on the radio, I said I would and two minutes later was broadcasting to the nation.

Apart from a potted autobiography my main point was that organisations, the u3a in particular, are ideally set up to give opportunities for retired or semi-retired people to realise their potential and pursue interests, hobbies and activities that they may have had earlier in life, but work had got in the way, or to discover new subjects that were now available to them.

I stressed that the u3a was run by local volunteers and the groups on offer were run by enthusiasts rather than experts and the only expectation was to become involved with like-minded people. I did specifically mention Halesworth u3a, but with the limited time it was not possible to include all its current groups.

I then packed up my car to drive to Huntingfield for a music festival that I was performing at with the u3a Halesworth Ukulele Band and a little later with u3a affiliated Blyth River Blues. It would immodest to say we were the two best acts on the bill, but we were; as ever, fine representatives of the creative and motivating force of Halesworth u3a.



**Andrew Hyde**

### **Blues Talk at The Cut**

There will be a multi-illustrated talk at **The Cut on Thursday September 18th 2025**. It will be presented by U3A member Andrew Hyde, who also runs The Blyth River Blues Band, the u3a Guitar Groups and drives the local Hoppa Bus. Andrew is a life-long Blues enthusiast, musician and former music industry executive who now lives in Halesworth.

For more information, visit The Cut website:

<https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/thecut/halesworth-vinyl-collective-the-blues/e-xoblmd>

### **Guitar Group (The Swan Uppers)**

Status: Active, open to new members with at least basic playing abilities.

Group Coordinator: Guitar Group Leader

When: Twice a month.

**Electric Guitar** 2nd Thursday of the Month,  
4pm to 6pm, at Westhall Village Hall.

**Acoustic Guitar** last Thursday of the Month,  
4.30pm to 6.30pm, at The Community Room,  
The Community Room (The Coop))

It would be an advantage to be at least a basic player and to have the relevant acoustic or electric guitar for the session. While we are a supportive and mixed ability group, the emphasis is on playing not teaching but we will offer advice on some theory and techniques where it would be useful.



**'The Drawing for the Terrified Group'** met for two sessions on Dunwich beach, 'en plein aire'.  
 'They look very relaxed to me!' (Editor!)

**Handicraft Group**



Our new term begins on Monday 22nd. September, 2:30 - 4:30 in Wissett.  
 We have projects for all abilities and several vacancies too.  
 Do come and join us to make seasoned gifts and heirloom items.  
 Newcomers please call Melita on 07790 215033.  
 or email: [melita.rouseclarke@btinternet.com](mailto:melita.rouseclarke@btinternet.com)

**Eric Midwinter**



11 February 1932 – 8 August 2025

It is with great sadness that we share the news of the death of Eric Midwinter, one of the visionary co-founders of the u3a movement in the UK. Eric, alongside Peter Laslett and Michael Young, established u3a in 1982 with the belief that later life should be a time of continued learning, connection, and contribution. Eric's commitment to challenging negative stereotypes of ageing, and to creating spaces for older adults to share skills, knowledge, and friendship, has shaped the lives of hundreds of thousands of u3a members over four decades. Eric's vision has flourished over the years and we know that his legacy will continue to inspire new generations to embrace lifelong learning and positive ageing.

**Film Appreciation** continues to offer group members an opportunity to introduce others to a film they feel passionate about, and to lead a group discussion about the movie's background and on member's reactions to it. After the August break, we return in September with Ben Affleck's true-life political thriller ARGO. If you wish to join the group, please contact us via the u3a Halesworth website.

**Film Club** Started earlier in the year, the Film Club is open to all Halesworth u3a members, and screens a film on the **first Tuesday of each month** at 2.30 at The Cut. Recommendations for titles from members are encouraged! The newsletter was too late to include the September film – 'Shakespeare In Love'.

**Monthly Talks**

These are free to members. Non members £4

**Tuesday 16th September at 2.30 pm  
The September Night Sky - Jonathan Clough**



A planetarium show, taking us through the delights of the darkening September skies. A parade of planets stretches across the sky starting with Saturn in the early evening, visiting Uranus and Jupiter through the night and finishing with the morning star Venus, just before the sun rises.

He will explain the setting of the summer triangle of stars, the rising of the winter hexagon, including the constellations of Orion and Taurus.

**Tuesday 21st. October. Our AGM at 2.00pm. This is an important meeting to present information on our u3a and to elect the management committee for the coming year.**

**2.30pm October. The Religious Guilds of Medieval Suffolk - Jane Gosling**



When people think of guilds (the original spelling), they usually associate them with craft and trade. Yet the vast majority of medieval guilds were religious and charitable institutions.

This talk by Jane Gosling, Lavenham Guildhall's former Manager, places the guilds in context and looks at their history, the fine buildings they erected, and their ultimate downfall at the hands of Edward VI.

**Tuesday 18th November at 2.30pm Hidden Treasures of our Sea - Rob Spray**



Although the North Sea does not have much rugged, rocky coast that people associate with abundant flora and fauna, offshore there are plenty of places for fascinating animals to hide.

Rob from Seasearch will describe some of the amazing wildlife which lives unnoticed just off our own coast. The sea needs our support and protection. We have the chance to save our seas for the future - and to know the risks of not doing so.

**Finally, can you name the titles of these films associated with railways? (Not Paddington!)**



The next edition deadline is **November 25<sup>th</sup> Arial 11 please** to [halesworthu3anews@gmail.com](mailto:halesworthu3anews@gmail.com)