



u3a



Halesworth and District - Newsletter
December - 2025

Merry Christmas! That's The Spirit!



Brewery House - now Hooker House



William Hooker



Today's Maltings Legacy

Images courtesy of Halesworth Town Trail and Suffolk Museums

It doesn't take long, when studying the history of Halesworth, to realise that the production of alcohol played an important part in its past. In the eighteenth century, the brewing of malt from local barley and the manufacture of ale wasn't just for the local pubs, of which there were plenty, but also for export to London and the Midlands. The River Blythe had been made navigable to the sea thus enabling goods to flow both ways including the import of coal and salt for the preservation of fish. Amongst the maltsters was William Joseph Hooker. Born in Norwich in 1783 and with considerable private means, he was persuaded by his father-in-law to invest in a brewery in Halesworth. He became a brewery manager from 1810 until 1820, living in Brewery House and during that time his equally famous son Joseph was born, who was to follow his father, becoming the second director of Kew Gardens and great friend of Charles Darwin.

Luckily for the world of botany, but not for his personal finances, William Hooker's time in the malting trade, was unsuccessful. He had meanwhile made a name for himself as a botanist. By the time he had settled in Halesworth, he had already discovered a new variety of moss close to Norwich (*Buxbaumia aphylla*) and two years later another in Scotland. He had previously made the acquaintance of the famous Sir Joseph Banks, who had been a botanist with Captain Cook on his voyages in the Endeavour. Enquiring whether, with his research and experience, he had any future in botany, Hooker was rewarded with the Chair of Botany at Glasgow University. By all accounts he was a gifted lecturer and admired by his students.



Buxbaumia Aphylla
Plant Source website

The house that now bears his name was originally twice the size. Hooker had also extended the garden down to the river and with it established a very famous orchid house. Despite the house being famous and becoming listed in 1949, it had little architectural merit. In the early seventies plans began to evolve to remove traffic flow from the Throughfare, which at that time still had buses and other large vehicles using it. The plan would require a partial demolition of the house to provide space for a bypass and roundabout. There was of course considerable opposition to the plan. Questions were even asked in the House of Lords.

An inquiry was held in February 1971, but all of the objections were eventually dismissed. Nevertheless, Saxons Way was not constructed until 1989 when the house was reduced in size, receiving its current name and today is a shadow of its former self, housing a dental practice.



James Holloway

The town still has some maltings surviving. Significant amongst these is the Cut Arts Centre. It was founded over twenty-five years ago by the remarkable determination and financial sacrifice of James Holloway (1946 - 2019). He had studied theology in his early years and also somehow acquired building skills along the way. He was surprisingly one of the founders of the Christian 'Greenbelt Festival', held annually in August. The finished Cut was officially opened by Sir Alan Bates in 2003,

Apart from its two major breweries, Suffolk is the home of a highly regarded manufacturer of cider in the village of Aspell. There is also a vineyard in Wisset and not to be outdone, Shawsgate Vineyard is less than a dozen miles away, on the road to Framlingham. Both offer opportunities to visit, taste and purchase wines. This is certainly a growing market for these wines, enabling wine production far away from its traditional roots.

If the foregoing isn't enough, we now have gin distilleries in the county. There are at least three and one no further than Aldeburgh. Tasting is also available, but not for the driver! So Halesworth residents can celebrate the festive season with a variety of locally produced alcohol. Happy Christmas to all our readers but don't overdo it!

And now for a different sort of Christmas cheer!



Thanks to Phil Joiner - editor of Wanstead and Woodford u3a newsletter for his special Christmas fun edition

From the Chairwoman

In October our AGM heralded the start of a new u3a year. We welcomed two new committee members, Tony Brown and Halina Politowicz. Halina was co-opted at our first committee meeting in November, and we hope that another volunteer will join the committee in the New Year. During the year we said goodbye and sincere thanks to Sharon Lovelock and Jill Daines, who stood down at the AGM. Happily, Jill will continue to contribute her enthusiasm, planning membership drives and with Michael, producing and distributing very eye-catching posters. We are grateful to leavers and joiners for their contributions.

Our AGM was very well attended, and I thank Vic Hopkins, our vice chairman, who stood in for me. My thanks also to Martin Sparks our treasurer and Connie Topping our secretary, for ensuring the meeting ran smoothly and was a success.

Burns Night Supper. Plans are afoot to run a Burns Night Supper in conjunction with The Angel, Halesworth. This will be a ticketed event on Saturday 24th January. Further details and booking information will be circulated before Christmas. We hope that there will be plenty of interest so now is the time to hunt out some tartan in the charity shops!

Volunteers are always in demand!

Members of our u3a are pretty good at volunteering and the spirit of giving is what keeps our wonderful organisation trotting along. However, times are a-changing and it's questionable whether future generations will be so generous with their time and skills. On a recent BBC Radio 4 programme I heard an interviewee say that these days people are very happy to volunteer for a task if by doing so they can improve their CV! An understandable sentiment, but of course not every voluntary activity contributes to work experience.

Halesworth Town Council is seeking councillors to help steer the council through changing times. This is an opportunity to put hard won life skills to good use for our local community. The role is of course voluntary. Further details can be obtained from enquiries@halesworthtowncouncil.gov.uk

The Cut Arts Centre is also in need of more volunteers. There are a variety of roles available both front of house and administrative. The u3a are very keen to support the Cut because without the Cut our u3a life would be immensely poorer. There is no other venue in the district that can offer the facilities we enjoy at the Cut, and we are the envy of many other u3as, who don't have access to such a grand auditorium with café. If you can spare a few hours to help please contact the Centre Manager Aafke Groeneveld by telephone on 01986 873285, or email info@thecut.org.uk



A sketch of the band taken by a fan

Blyth River Blues Band update: The U3A Guitar Group spin-off 'The Blyth River Blues Band', who have recently been described as 'Suffolk's Finest Rockin' Blues Band', have played many gigs this year, including a Super Saturday at The Racehorse and The Buck on the same day in April. We performed for the Rumburgh May Day event, the 'Lowfest Beer Festival' in Laxfield, The White Swan, the Framlingham Country Show and the Henham Steam Fair.

We are now booking well into next year, with over a dozen already confirmed! Do check our Facebook page, which also now features a classic Sid Skint video of us playing live:

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

You can also find out how to join these two guitar groups, either acoustic or electric, both of which meet monthly using the same Facebook address.



'Halesworth Hoppa' and Festive Lights Tour 2025

Some of you may recall last year, the Halesworth Area Community Transport (HACT) organised a series of very successful evening tours of Halesworth's remarkable Festive Lights. We used the ever-popular 'Hoppa' mini-buses and stopped at a couple of the outstanding displays for a look around. We set off at about 5.30pm from The Angel Car Park and returned at about 7pm. The driver gave a running commentary on the route, pointing out some of the more spectacular displays. There are two scheduled stops and last year a selection of festive refreshments was served by your chairwoman.

We are repeating the Christmas Lights tour again this year and there is a bus reserved for U3A members on **Thursday December 18th**. The bus can take 16 passengers on a first come first served basis. Please book your place via Jo Dorey who will co-ordinate the bookings on: jodorey47@gmail.com or 07743 343702. There is no charge for this trip but a suggested donation of £5 will go to the charities supported by the particular sites on the route.



Christmas Event



Tuesday 16th December at 2.00pm Parisian Cabaret.

We will be entertained by former Bluebell Girl Jane Hoggar, with her new show 'Parisian Cabaret', exploring the fascinating history of the theatres of Montmartre from 1860 to 1960, including the wonderful period referred to as 'La Belle Époque'. Having worked for Miss Bluebell at the once famous Lido de Paris we are in for a treat as Jane regales us with the backstage anecdotes from shows at the Folies Bergère and the Moulin Rouge, belting out some Parisian classic songs made famous by Josephine Baker, and Edith Piaf. All this, plus refreshments by the tree in the Cut Café to begin the festive season.



Jazz Group The re-invigorated group has now been going for six months. We meet each month in Halesworth Library, where we can use the U3A's hi-fi system which is now permanently stored there. We work on a rolling basis where at the end of each session a member or two agree to run the next session. This has resulted in a wide variety of music which everyone agrees is both enjoyable and stimulating. New members would be very welcome. For more information, see our page on the Halesworth U3A website - <https://bit.ly/3LEdbY9>



The Discussion Group. Our friendly and lively group meets at 10.30 am on the third Wednesday of the month in the Co-op meeting room in Halesworth, where we explore a wide range of thought-provoking topics. Recent sessions have included 'The Impact of the Media,' 'The Palestinian-Israeli conflict', 'Is War Inevitable?' together with a fascinating look at AI and its impact on society.

Members are warmly encouraged to suggest subjects for future meetings and, if they wish, to lead a discussion, although there's absolutely no pressure to do so.

Our Christmas meeting on 17th December will take a lighter-hearted turn, comparing our childhood Christmases with what Christmas is like for children today. We currently have around 15 members and have room for a few more. If you would like to join us or simply try out a session, please contact the Group Leader via the u3a website.



Local History Group. It has been a very good year and we have been able to conduct walks, talks and events in Halesworth and beyond. After a busy and successful Heritage Open Days in September, we joined forces with the Family History Group and held a drop-in centre for those interested in their ancestry which was very popular. Next year the Heritage theme is about everyday working lives, and we are looking forward to presenting our town's history to meet that theme. We have made great progress with the Halesworth History Map, an interactive site for all those wishing to discover layers of information on our buildings and people through every kind of written and visual and audio resource. Our 'Halesworth Portraits' research has been an illuminating way to drill down into biographies of people and institutions old and new. There is much to look forward to in the New Year.



Kurling has restarted and is now at Westhall Village Hall We meet on the last Thursday of the month, restarting on January 29th January from 2.00 until 4.00pm

It is a bright hall with an excellent floor. Centrally heated, with enough suitable parking and the Racehorse Pub is next door

We are looking for new players. No special skill required just a fun afternoon. Please contact me for more information or if you require a lift call Sandy Clisby on: 0777035 2200



Music Appreciation Group meets in the library on the last Thursday of the month from 10.30 to 12.00 noon,

January - The four great twentieth century English works for string orchestra.

February - Film Morning

Come for free taster. We're a friendly group sharing our love of classical music.

The Art Appreciation Group is an informal meeting discussing a range of topics, themes, movements and artists, each selected by the group as a whole for individual research and the presentation of findings followed by discussion.



Members are invited to volunteer their research, but it is also perfectly acceptable to just come along to listen. There is no pressure to lead. We meet monthly on the second Tuesday of the month between 10.00 am 12 noon. Currently there are about 12 members.

The October meeting was a visit to the Sainsbury Centre in Norwich to view the latest exhibition, where we were able to listen to the guided tour on the theme of evil and violence.

In contrast, the November visit to Ferini Gallery in Pakefield was a chance to see a variety of work from the Gallery artists and listen to a presentation by artist Caroline Way who had an exhibition there. The gallery was open by appointment and owner Michaela made us very welcome. The December meeting will be held at the Halesworth Museum where we will enjoy mince pies and discuss the past and coming year and look to developing the programme for 2026.

Community Technology Group

At the time of writing, we are preparing for our November meeting where we are going to discuss where we go in the New Year. The world of technology is changing fast and we want to consider how we might best maintain our long-standing purpose - to improve our understanding of technology and its impact on the community, particularly on older people. In recent months we have been looking at developments in technology, particularly inexpensive devices which we can learn to program. But we have also looked at approaches which seek to understand ageism within technology and how designers might take a more balanced approach to how our skills develop over the lifespan. For an up-to-date view of where this is taking us and more information about how and when we meet, see our page on the Halesworth U3A website - New members would be very welcome. <https://bit.ly/4nXS7ZT>



Monthly Talks for 2026. The Cut on the third Tuesday in the month 2.00pm



January 20th - Graham Murchie will give a talk entitled 'The Eyes of the Few', a history of the radar unit at Bawdsey, which opened in 1937. This played a vital part, not only in the Battle of Britain, but throughout the Second World War and well into the following Cold War era.



February 17th - Stephen Sugden, an equine chiropractic will explain his specialized form of veterinary care that focuses on diagnosing, treating, and managing horses' musculoskeletal systems. The use of manual adjustments and manipulations can improve movement, relieve pain and enhance the overall health of the horse.



Walking Group - a walk on 'the blue side'

The walk was about 4.5 miles, going out to Farnham Church and walking in an arc eventually back to the splendid woodland of the burial grounds. It was mainly on farm drives and tracks, with a short stretch of lightly trafficked road, ending on a rough path with stiles across the railway line. Blue sky and sunshine were followed by lunch at the Kings Head Yoxford.

Film Club takes place at The Cut on the first Tuesday of each month, and is open to all members, who obtain tickets at the box-office on the day. Recent screenings have included classics like *A Month in the Country*, *'Shakespeare in Love'*, *'Touch of Evil'* and *'The Sting'*.



On 2nd December, we are showing this year's most acclaimed British comedy-drama *'The Ballad of Wallis Island (2025)*. A lonely lottery winner (Tim Kay) on his own Welsh island invites a once famous folk singer, (Tom Basden) to perform a concert. However, when a former musician's girlfriend (Carey Mulligan) arrives, professional and personal rivalries that threaten the dream event. A beautiful, dryly amusing and warmly heartfelt film. It gained 5* reviews in *The Telegraph*, *Guardian*, *Independent*, and *Time Out*. **Admission is a £5 donation to the Cut.**

Film Day Launch:

Following much helpful encouragement and feedback from u3a members over the few months, we will be launching the new Film Day at the Cut on **Wednesday 28th January 10.30 am - 3pm**. Please put this date in your diary, with more details about the event to follow. Tickets will be available at the box-office on the day.

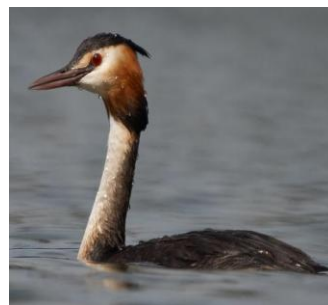
Science Group. Looking back on 2025, we have covered a wide range of topics and two field trips. We visited Sizewell B and in 2026 we start the year with a talk on the building and development of nuclear power stations and the crucially important topic of the safe disposal of radioactive waste. Earlier, we visited Dasha Astro (the stargazers' group based in Darsham) with the three 'Super Moons' of 2025. Towards the end of 2026, we have a talk on Particle Physics, 'the study of the particles & forces that constitute matter and radiation'. We are willing to tackle controversial topics including 'Trust in Science A.I. for everyday use, its pros & cons' and to explore new areas, such as 'Explosives - their history, chemistry and production'. Our field trip in 2026 is to "Quadram", a research facility on Norwich Research Park, including its research on 'healthy ageing!'. New members are always welcome. No scientific knowledge is required, just interest. We meet monthly on the 4th Thursday (Jan – Nov) at 2:00pm, Contact us on the website for further information.



Barn Owl



Great Spotted Woodpecker



Great Crested Grebe

Bird Watching Group. Our October meeting was at RSPB Minsmere, where we saw 60 species either on the scrapes, or at the Island Mere Hide. Around the reserve we observed. Red Kite, Hobby, and Great-crested Grebe which were new for the group this year. Old Hall Barns to Hen Reed Beds was our venue for November, where 50 species were seen or heard despite the high tide. The highlights were a flock of Redwing, a Kestrel and Great-spotted Woodpecker using the same tree and a Barn Owl in a nest box. Thanks to Lee for leading the walk. Our December meeting will take us to RSPB North Warren for Pintails and Geese as well as other species.

Ukulele Group. Looking back on 2025. we have enjoyed a really good year together. We have gained two new members. Teresa joined us early in the year, when she moved to the area and she has become quite an asset to the group, having some previous ukulele experience and a strong voice. Sue has recently joined and despite being thrown in at the deep end, with rehearsals for forthcoming concerts, also decided to join the guitar group!

Chris, our co-ordinator, does a brilliant job encouraging us musicality, introducing new music and fresh arrangements of old favourites. Having taught himself the ukulele when he joined the group eight years ago, Chris has since gone on to learn the bass ukulele. It does not have the same tuning as a standard ukulele and focuses on single notes rather than chords, helping us keep the beat and timing, adding a rich 'bottom line' to the band. Thanks to Chris for all he does for the group.

Our photo shows Mike celebrating his 94th birthday, after driving himself from Southwold. He spent the morning, as usual on a Tuesday, strumming and eating cake surrounded by the lady members.



We have several events coming up, including a fundraiser for the Holton Village Hall committee, on Friday 5th December, the Halesworth produce market at St Mary's on Saturday 13th December. We are always happy to welcome new members, especially if they can sing lower than soprano, but the singing is not compulsory! You are welcome to come and try.

A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

Deadline for the March newsletter is March 25th in Arial 11 please, using the dedicated email: halesworthu3anews@gmail.com

John Treadway