

*** Monthly Meeting – Friday 26th April***

Please join us at our next **Member’s Monthly** meeting.
It will start at **2pm** on **Friday 26th April** at **SHEPPEY HALL, QUEENBOROUGH**

The Wreck of the Richard Montgomery

Colin Harvey

Just in case you didn’t know, there’s a wartime wreck with more than 1,400 tons of explosives on board lying less than 200 yards from a busy shipping lane north of the Isle of Sheppey.



The SS Richard Montgomery was an American Liberty ship which ran aground and broke its back on a sandbank in the Thames Estuary between Sheppey and Southend on 20th August 1944. The vessel was on its way to the French port of Cherbourg, which had only just been recaptured by the Allies.

For nearly 80 years, there has been speculation about what might happen if the Richard Montgomery’s lethal cargo of bombs and ammunition blew up. It has been variously dubbed the “Doomsday Vessel” or the “Timebomb Ship” and the subject of numerous media features, TV dramas and documentaries.

But eight decades later, the Richard Montgomery – and the Isle of Sheppey – are both still here!

Local historian Colin Harvey, the author of a book and a documentary about the Richard Montgomery, is the speaker at our April meeting. What he doesn’t know about Sheppey’s “famous”- or should that be infamous- ship isn’t worth knowing.

Save the date for next month: Thursday 23rd May

Kent Reformation to Revolution – Christoph Bull

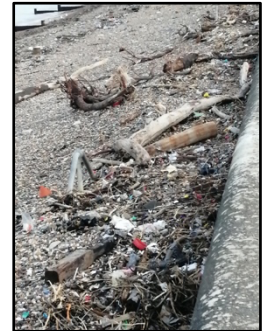
COMING UP...

REMINDER		This month’s meeting is on a Friday
David’s Slice of Life	Page 2	Sheppey Beaches is the theme for this month’s article by David
Committee News - AGM	Page 3	Payment details for 24/25 subscriptions if you haven’t renewed your membership yet Advance notice for our AGM in May
Interest Groups & Activities	Page 4	Register for any groups you are interested in joining
THEIR FINEST HOUR	Page 4/5	Isle of Sheppey u3a contributes to the national u3a project in conjunction with Oxford University
National u3a	Page 6/7	There’s a wide range of national online talks, workshops and courses available, included in your membership for FREE!
Keep Smiling	Page 7	A little humour.
Information & Contact details	Page 8	Let us know if you want to join our members only Facebook Group and/or u3a General WhatsApp Group?

David's Slice of Life

Something slightly different this month. With summer (hopefully) approaching, I thought I'd write four short pieces with a Sheppey beach theme, as I've lived most of my life close to them and, for around 15 years, the sea was virtually on my doorstep at my parents' home in Marine Parade, Sheerness.

1) On February 27th, a couple of days after a severe storm, we went for a walk with some friends along the beach at the Leas, Minster. I was shocked at the huge amount of rubbish washed ashore – enough tree trunks for a small forest, masses of plastic and just about anything else you care to name. It looked like a Mission Impossible clean-up. But, just two days later, a team of 48 volunteers was in action, removing 119 bags of rubbish weighing 119kg. They were out in force again, at The Leas on March 14th and in Sheerness a couple of weeks later, as well as Leysdown and Eastchurch, the latter to clear up the residue of rubbish which had washed ashore after illegal dumping. Full marks to all these volunteers, and to the Medway Swale Estuary Partnership Group, which organises some of the clean-ups. Most of us are guilty of taking Sheppey's beautiful beaches for granted. But without the hard work of ALL the volunteers from the various groups which participate in the rubbish clearance, our beaches would be unwelcoming to say the least. Incidentally, it was interesting to read on Facebook that the Sheerness branches of Tesco and McDonald's are joining forces on May 13th for a beach clean-up. Full marks, too, to all the staff involved for doing their bit, especially to those from McDonald's, not least because their company (or rather its customers) was named as the UK's second worst packaging polluter in a survey last year.



2) Next, a couple of pleas to Swale Council: Firstly, do more (they couldn't do less!) to enforce the rules concerning dogs on beaches during the summer. Man's best friend is not allowed on the beach at The Leas from May 1st-September 30th when this popular spot is packed with families and young children. These rules are often ignored, either through ignorance or deliberately, even though there is a £100 penalty. Secondly, and as soon as possible, the council must start charging the owners of all the camper vans and caravans parked 24/7 along the Shingle Beach between Sheerness and The Leas. The area has now turned into a permanent camp site, mostly by people who do not live locally. It has become a real eyesore.

3) Turning back the clock, 60 years ago the beach at Sheerness was the responsibility of a retired lieutenant colonel, an employee of Sheerness Urban District Council, whose rather authoritarian-sounding job title was "Sea Front Controller." I interviewed him a few times in my very early days as a trainee journalist. Decades later, when I thought back to the lieutenant colonel and Sheerness seafront, I could never get The Fat Controller and Thomas the Tank Engine out of my mind! But I don't think the Sea Front Controller ever had to do much controlling or launch a military operation to keep the locals in check. Vandalism and anti-social behaviour were virtually non-existent. Sadly, our seafront and beach amenities now seem to hold a special attraction for Sheppey's increasing number of mindless yobs intent on criminal damage.

4) And, finally, just to demonstrate that I don't just hurl brickbats at local authorities, full marks to Swale Council for doing its best to brighten up the sea fronts at Sheerness and Minster Leas, where the beaches are proudly flying the prestigious Blue Flag award. Together with Leysdown, they have also received awards from the Keep Britain Tidy organisation. Plaudits, too, to Sheerness Town Council for the new "Welcome To Sheerness" sign opposite the town's railway station, an addition which makes the approach to the seafront considerably more vibrant than it has been since the hey-days of Sheerness beach and promenade in the 50s and 60s.

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS 2024/25

Thank you to all our members who have already renewed, email confirmation will be sent out soon. If you have not renewed yet, we have kept subscriptions for the year 1st April 2024 – 31st March 2025 at £20. We will be collecting subscriptions again at the April meeting where you can pay with cash, cheque (payable to **Isle of Sheppey u3a**) or by card.

You can also pay by bank transfer at any time, please enter your name as reference and confirm by email that you have paid so that we can track the payments more easily.

PAYMENT DETAILS

Account Name: Isle of Sheppey u3a
Sort Code: 20-54-25

Account Number: 33003361
Reference: Your Name

MONTHLY MEETING DATES 2024

Meetings are held on the fourth Thursday of each month at 2pm until 4pm (except in December) at the Sheppey Hall in Queenborough. Refreshments are included (except for Picnic in the Park). Doors open 1.40pm.

23rd May – AGM
27th June
25th July

22nd August – Picnic in the Park
(Sheppey Sea Cadets – Barton’s Point)
22nd August
26th September

24th October
28th November
12th December
(Christmas meeting)

AGM - May 2024

The committee wish to give advanced notice that they have agreed to hold the 2024 AGM on Thursday 23rd May at Sheppey Hall at 2pm. This will be followed by the usual member’s monthly meeting.

VOLUNTEERS REQUIRED - Our Isle of Sheppey u3a can only continue with the support of the members. We need volunteers to join us to keep our u3a running, please let us know if you would like to help in anyway. No experience required, just a little bit of time and plenty of enthusiasm.

U3a are run entirely by volunteers and all members are invited and encouraged to get involved in supporting their local u3a where they can. Our committee members are only in office for a limited period and we need members to replace these positions to keep our committee fresh and vibrant and keep our u3a moving on into the future.

INTEREST GROUPS & ACTIVITIES

Each interest group has its own communications list so, if you are interested in joining any of our interest groups, please sign up at one of our meetings or email us at: isleofsheppeyu3a@gmail.com

If you would like help to start up a group or arrange an outing, please let us know.

Find out more about our groups on our website: [Isle of Sheppey u3a Interest Groups Information](#)

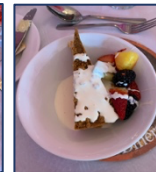
SUNDAY CARVERY LUNCH @ The Masonic Club – Sunday 12th May

The first Sunday lunch held in March was very well received and Sally has booked the next one for Sunday 12th May – 12.30pm to sit down at 1pm.

The meal will be a carvery, as last time, with a choice of meats, a wide range of vegetables including cauliflower cheese and the usual accompaniments of Yorkshire pudding, stuffing and pigs in blankets. There will be a variety of desserts to choose, plus cheese and biscuits followed by tea/coffee and mints. We think you will agree that this is excellent value for money at £20 per person. Wine and other drinks can be purchased at the bar.



If you have already put your name down you will receive an email to book your place. There is plenty of space so if you would like to go, please email us to be added to the Sunday Lunch group and to confirm your place.



THEIR FINEST HOUR

“What did you do in the War, Daddy?”

This question, which was imagined to be on the lips of many baby-boomers during the late forties and fifties, is now filling the minds of Oxford University. They have linked up with the u3a, not only to learn what Daddy did, but also all of the family who experienced the 2nd World War. The results of this research project will be recorded and available on the internet for all to see nationwide from 6th June 2024. This date was chosen to commemorate the Centenary of D-Day.

The Isle of Sheppey u3a wanted to play an active part in this project, so our members were asked, through our Social History Group, to dig out their family wartime stories for others to share. The project is called “Their Finest Hour” and so it turned out to be, although the response from members was disappointing in terms of member numbers involved. Nevertheless, what it lacked in quantity it compensated for in stories of humour, pathos, courage and dogged determination to carry on regardless in very stressful times.

Among the varied stories, we heard of Christine Woodard’s grandfather, found approaching his sister’s house “...wearing his pyjamas and slippers and over this his black coat and bowler hat. He was pushing his bicycle and attached to the bicycle was the family dog.” This paints a humorous picture until one learns that Granddad’s house had just been obliterated in the Blitz and that what he had with him was everything he now possessed.

Peter Bury told us how his father had spent the night in the sea, on the beaches of Dunkirk awaiting evacuation, holding his rifle above his head, to keep it in working order. If he failed, or lost his rifle, he would be put on a charge. In the morning his rifle was still working, but he could not move his arms to use it! In the ‘Hell on Earth’ that was Dunkirk such personal dramas were being played out in their thousands among the participants.

Closer to home, Frederick Goodin had got on his bike to volunteer for the RAF, but he was against a strong headwind, so he had stopped at the first available recruiting office. He had just joined the London Irish Regiment. His wife was not amused!

Betty Allsworth's father and great uncle were in the Royal Navy throughout the war. Betty's mother and great aunt were to be the recipients of a major understatement of the war when they received letters telling them "...not to be concerned if they heard nothing from their husbands for a few weeks, as they may be at sea." It was the D-Day Landings. Betty's father went on to win the DSO off the coast of Normandy.

Even closer to home, the wartime police, at Queenborough, received reports of unidentified signals at Harty Ferry. Was this an enemy vessel or agents in the Swale? Our intrepid local policeman was driven out to Harty in one of the few cars on the Island – it would have been a long way for him to pedal – only to find it was our own troops on either side of the Swale chatting. After the policeman's visit the signals stopped!

In Sheerness, Norman Shaw was saying goodnight to his sweetheart, Iris, when shrapnel from an overhead aerial dogfight passed through her arm. A week later she was allowed home from hospital. Norman, however, survived the D-Day landings and the fight into Germany without any war wounds. They celebrated their diamond wedding and Iris has recently achieved her 100th birthday.

Also, very close to home are the stories of our contributors' own wartime experiences of the evacuation of children from this afflicted corner of the country. From between the lines one can picture their total bewilderment at what was happening to them in this suddenly alienated world that was the 1940s.

These stories of everyday people have been brought back to life, as this project intended, and preserved for all to read and learn from. These are just our local contributions to a nationwide project, but it illustrates that those wartime years truly were "Their Finest Hour" and worthy of preservation.

"Their Finest Hour"

The Isle of Sheppey u3a list of contributors

Christine Woodard: Being 'Bombed Out'

Pamela Goodin: A Prisoner-of-War Camp Commander

Shirley Bury: War as a Child

Stephen Bury: Different Areas of Conflict

Norman Bowden: When I first Met My Father

David Goodin: Voluntarily Enlisting for the War; War in the Desert; War in the Desert – 2

Betty Allsworth: Minor Preparations for D-Day; Just One D-Day Act of Heroism; Wartime Policing on the Isle of Sheppey; Rescue from Dunkirk – Preparations at Sheerness

Valeria Reveley: The Simpkins at War

Colin Corder: Defending Sheerness

Janet Booth: Wartime Evacuees

Edna Jones: Memories of Childhood Evacuation

Joyce Stanton: Normal Life for a Child in Wartime

Marilyn Orpin: A War Wound; A Father's Letter to His Son; The Very Worst Day; From Normandy to Germany

NATIONAL u3a

Have you looked on the National u3a website? There's so much u3a members across the country are getting involved with.

Click here to find out more about what there is on offer nationally [National u3a](#). New events added monthly so, have a look and see if there's anything interesting that you'd like to join with in the next few weeks.

ONLINE LEARNING EVENTS

There are numerous and wide-ranging learning events and short courses (usually free online using zoom),
Coming up in April/May: [u3a online events](#)

- **Staying Safe Online – A u3a Presentation with Q&A**
- **Understanding Online Safety: Expert Tips for you and others from AbilityNet**
- **Secrets of the Human Brain – Brain, Pain & Anaesthetics**
- **Osteoporosis Bone Health – The work of the Royal Osteoporosis Society**
- **Antibiotics - Discovery, Mechanisms & Future Issues**
- **Deafness & Beyond – The tribulation & Triumph of Ludwig van Beethoven**
- **AI Chatbots, a beginner's guide**
- **Science Network Event – A talk on AI**
- **Much Ado about Numbers – A Rob Eastaway Talk**
- **110 Years of aviation History in Hertfordshire 1913 – 2023**
- **The Story of the Workhouse – Welfare on England before 1948**
- **The Stories of Eva & Istvan Wirth**
- **Help Us Remember - Imperial War Museum introduces the work of the War Memorials Register**
- **Driving on Country Roads with IAM RoadSmart**
- **Cryptic Crosswords for Beginners: 6 weekly sessions course**
- **Exploring World Faiths: Religious Mysticism**
- **The Harlem Renaissance**
- **Turner's Timeless Treasures**
- **Laughter Yoga with Merrie Maggie**
- **Laughter Yoga with Judith**
- **Mindfulness Meditation**

NATIONAL PROGRAMMES

Enter your poetry and short stories in the competitions, submit your paintings/drawings and photographs to be featured in the online galleries. See what other members across the country have already submitted and see if you can spot anything from our of our Isle of Sheppey u3a members. Get involved by clicking here: [u3a National Programmes](#)

Take part or just browse other members' submissions.

Enter Your Photography & Art

- **Paint or Draw – New theme each month**
- **U3a Eye – Themed Photography Project**
- **Found in Nature – Photo Gallery of all things weird and wonderful in nature**

Writing Competitions

- **Poetry Competition 23-24**
- **Short Story Competition 23 – Shortlisted Stories**

Share Your Memories

- **Write a Letter to your Younger Self**
- **All our Yesterdays**

Puzzles & Games

- **Logic Puzzles**
- **Maths Challenge**
- **Aileen's Game**

NATIONAL u3a NEWS

Advertising Campaign with BOOM Radio

Have you heard any of the u3a adverts on Boom radio?

National Office have recently made this announcement that you may have seen if you are signed up to the National u3a Friends newsletter:

“We are thrilled to announce that we will be running an advertising campaign with Boom Radio, which has over half a million listeners over the age of 55. The three-month campaign will start in April, alongside a u3a social media campaign, and will feature three u3a members sharing their stories about what u3a means to them.

[Listen to Boom Radio](#) and let us know what you think by emailing communications@u3a.org.uk.”

“u3a Friends” NEWSLETTER

Sign up to get the most up to date news from National Office and find out the latest news and learning events as they are added.



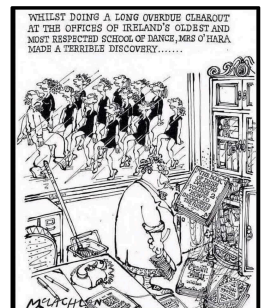
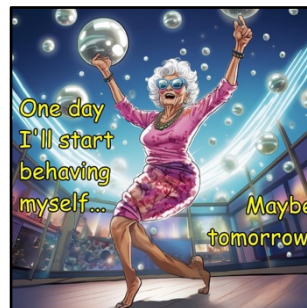
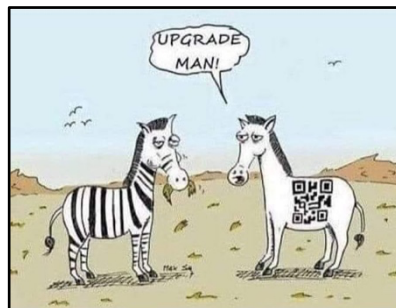
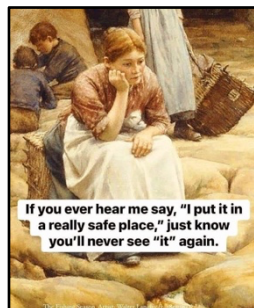
RADIO PODCAST

Have you listened to the latest monthly **u3a Radio podcasts** on YouTube? Each month on 17th a new episode is uploaded.

Click here for the full list of radio podcasts since they started:

[u3a Radio Podcast Playlist](#)

KEEP SMILING



Information & Contact Details

You can contact us here:

[Isleofsheppeyu3a@gmail.com](mailto:isleofsheppeyu3a@gmail.com)

Find our website here:

<https://u3asites.org.uk/isle-of-sheppey/home>

Email us to join our WhatsApp Group:

[Isleofsheppeyu3a@gmail.com](mailto:isleofsheppeyu3a@gmail.com)

Our Facebook Page is:

<https://www.facebook.com/isleofsheppeyu3a>

Our members only Facebook Group is:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/384159678869515>

Interact with u3a members around the country on the

u3a: Keeping in Touch Facebook group:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/U3AKeepingInTouch>

u3a YouTube Channel

<https://www.youtube.com/user/TheU3a/videos>

Diversity & Inclusion Statement

Isle of Sheppey u3a recognises that everyone is different and aims to create an environment that values and treats all members fairly. We are committed to promoting equality and diversity and to ensure that u3a membership is as accessible as possible to different groups within the community.