



*Members'  
Journeys with  
the u3a'*

## Insights into our u3a by Jo Madge

I don't think there is a better way to introduce new members to the running of our u3a and to our very active and successful interest groups than to include transcripts between Brian, our chair and Chris Smith, Mike Stringer and Howard Corlett on their journey into and being active members of Limebrook u3a. When reading this, as a new member you will see just how welcoming and friendly our u3a is.

This is the transcript of Chris Smith's conversation with Brian:

### 'My Journey with the u3a'

Christine says: "I was working full time at the RHS at Hyde Hall when one day someone I had not seen for a while caught my eye and we started to have a chat. Jo Madge had been my son's primary school teacher. She asked me what I was doing and I explained that I was still working full time.

"So, what are you going to do when you retire?" Jo asked me. I said I was not sure what I would do to fill my time and it was then that Jo introduced me to the idea of the u3a and told me that they are a group of people who share interests and have monthly meetings with a guest speaker and asked if I would like to come along. Well, two years later when I moved from full time to part time work, I decided to take Jo up on her offer and she took me along as a guest to the Limebrook group, which is based at the West Maldon Community Centre.

"The people were very friendly, I enjoyed the speaker and Jo introduced me to various people who ran Interest Groups. These groups were varied, with some things I was already interested in and others which were new to me.

### A sunny walk around Bradwell

"I joined The Walking Group and I found that during the couple of hours on the walks I would get to talk to different people. There is always time during our break halfway through the walk when we can chat to others as we have something nice to drink and a bite to eat.



**Walking Group  
enjoying a post  
Xmas lunch**

**Chris receiving  
trophy for  
photography  
competition**



"Photography has always been an interest of mine and there is a very active photography group that meet to discuss photography, but we also go out on trips together."



Chris has been successful with her photography. She has had two photographs published in the national u3a magazine. One was in the recent competition called Winter Watch. She took a photograph early one morning when she went to work at RHS at Hyde Hall.

During the lockdown she entered a competition and was successful with her photograph titled "Connected". In the annual Limebrook calendar for 2021, her photograph of the Maylandsea Raft Race was selected for the September photograph.

"Another Group that has been really interesting is Photoshop, where we get together to discuss how to improve our photographs and to use different technology".

I enjoy the theatre and there is a very thriving Theatre Group which arranges trips to theatres both in London and locally," Chris adds.

### **Visit to the London Museum Docklands**

A group that I joined a couple of years ago covers History. We have visits to various locations all over Essex and London and we have a series of meetings and talks with speakers. The range of subjects is extremely broad.

And of course, there is the Social Group which arranges activities for days out and lunches and a good get together at Christmas. There is something for everybody.



Limebrook u3a really is a wonderful community. It is such a friendly group, and I have genuinely made friends who will be friends for life.

While I was still in full time work my son asked me, "What are you going to do when you retire?" When I told him about the u3a and the range of activities offered, he said, "Good for you, you have got to go for it."

"Without the support and friendship offered by u3a, I do not know what I would have done with my time. My husband Steve is still in full time employment and he looks forward to the time when he can be involved, too.

"I have found that my membership at Limebrook has proved to be the best £20 a year that I invest in myself. For that modest fee I have found a great group of friends, many activities that I would not have done on my own and a very active social life.

This is the transcript of Howard's conversation with Brian:

### **'My Journey with the u3a'**

For the last 20 years of my working life, I was a freelance translator. Being self-employed I worked when the work came in and with no holiday pay or sick pay from an employer and this kept me active over many evenings, weekends and throughout the working day, turning important legal and financial documents and translations for business around with tight deadlines.

I could have worked on; however, I was more than ready to retire. Fortunately, my Financial Adviser confirmed that I did have enough income and money to make the step, so that solved part of my decision-making process. The second part however was how would I fill my time?

Photography has always been my main hobby, and although I had been an active member of Maldon Camera Club, that alone would not fill the free time that retirement would bring.

Phil Watkins is the Chairman of the Maldon Camera Club and early in 2019 he asked if I would like to give a talk to the Limebrook u3a Photography Group. At their March Meeting at the WMCC I gave a talk using my own photographs, on the subject of the Isle of Man where I was born. Graham Churchill and the members enjoyed the talk and they invited me to their next field visit to Beeleigh Falls. I had not heard of the u3a, and was interested to learn more. On a sunny day in July, I joined the group and got to meet a lot of people who shared my interest in photography. While spending time taking photographs it became obvious that I had found something special, and decided to join Limebrook. The people in the Photography Group are very friendly and it is a social group of members with varying experience of photography and is very different from camera clubs.



The Chairman, Brian Harris, spent a lot of the trip to Beeleigh answering my questions about the u3a and of all of the other interests and activities open to members. At one of the Monthly Meetings where we have guest speakers talking on a wide range of topics, a request was made for new volunteers to join the committee. I believe it is important to contribute and help run organisations, so I joined the committee. During the pandemic, I had to sharpen my pencils and take on the role of Minutes Secretary. After a period, Christine Steel stood down as Secretary, and I took on that important role and continued to take the Minutes.

The concern about filling my time in retirement completely vanished. As well as the Photography Group, the list of my activities has increased to include History. As well as outside speakers who present on a wide range of subjects, we also have presentations by the members. Last year I gave a talk about my father's experiences as a Prisoner of War. With the research and images collected over the years, it provided something very personal to me, and provoked questions and a better understanding of what happened in those days, over 75 years ago.

Scrabble appeals to my love of words, and we meet each week to test and improve our skills. There is lots of laughter and it is a great experience sharing with my new found friends.



Each month the Walking Group plans a trip, and it is good to be out and about with interesting people and we always end up in a café or pub for something to eat and a natter.

For people on their own, it is difficult to fill the weekends. The Weekend Companions group arranges trips out to places of interest, coffee mornings, meals out and activities during the week.



To complement my photography, I attend the Photoshop meetings where we learn how to improve our images and pick up new ideas and skills using computer software.



Having experienced so many new opportunities at Limebrook, it was easy for me to take on another role as an Interest Group Leader. A 10-pin bowling group was proposed, and I took on the role of setting up and arranging the meetings. This is not an onerous task as I just send out an email once a month. We have 20 members of varying abilities and it is a really enjoyable and social activity with competition not being the main objective.

There is an Interest Group for all tastes and activities. Otherwise, you can set up a new group with the help of the Committee. I have met so many friendly and interesting people who share common interests.

[I have been so lucky to find a gem like Limebrook u3a.](#)

This is the transcript of Mike's conversation with Brian:

### **'My Journey with the u3a'**

I was still working full time when we moved to Bicknacre, my wife Chris found out about u3a when talking with our neighbours. The Heybridge u3a group they were part of was not taking any new members, so it was decided that a new u3a be formed in Maldon.

Chris got involved with the initial meetings to set up Limebrook u3a and was a founding member, as I continued to work. Chris became very active with Limebrook and we attended social trips and Theatre visits together. When I retired at the end of 2015, it was an easy decision to join as a full member of Limebrook; the wide range of interest groups looked very interesting and created good opportunities to meet new people. It is especially good for people on their own.

Limebrook is always looking to encourage new activities, so I decided it would be good to have a mix of my favourite pastimes by setting up a new group, the Real Ale Group, or RAG as we called it. It was formed in 2017, the original numbers have grown and now we have around 18 members to call on.

Other u3as might regard us as a "social science" group, the only difference is that ours takes place in the pub. We are from a wide range of backgrounds and it is very good finding out about common interests and various thoughts and ideas over a pint or two at a CAMRA pub. We like to support local businesses on our outings, and these are arranged not just in Maldon, but also the surrounding villages and Chelmsford as well. On one of our trips, we arranged to start at the Cricketers in Moulsham Street, we had 14 of us for lunch, before working our way down to the Woolpack taking in other pubs and a micro pub, crowding 14 of us in was interesting to say the least!

A favourite haunt is the Queen Victoria in Spital Road Maldon, they provide excellent food and real ale, great service and a warm welcome, and their first beer festival in 2020. Our monthly meetings have been off the agenda since March 2020 owing to Covid, so we have kept in touch using Zoom. When the rule of six comes in, we should arrange our first outing of 2021.



You do not need to have a partner to be part of a u3a and my wife Chris isn't able to do long walks (she says I ramble enough anyway!), so I joined the Walking Group.

The u3a is ideal for couples to have different interests, so you do not have to drag along your partner if they are not interested in the same activities as yourself. When we are walking with the group, it is usually in the morning, and we stop for lunch, which means you get to meet different people during the walk, get some exercise and have fun at the same time.

One group that was missing from Limebrook u3a was on the topic of history, although Chris runs the family history group. Something broader appealed to me after a member floated the idea of forming a History Group. A list of people was prepared but the chap who volunteered then didn't have time to organise things. I spent 40 years in my professional life being organised and doing research, and by nature I'm curious and a little nosey and like to find out about things that are of interest to me. So I took on the role of interest group leader. of history general rather than specific to one topic or era.

We have over 50 people who have taken part in our activities. We have had indoor meetings with a variety of speakers, together with visits to different places of interest. We've had guided tours in various places as far afield as Ingatestone Hall, the Moot Hall in Maldon, Bury St Edmunds and Harwich, and trips to London which have included the Guildhall, the Dickens Museum, and the Post Office Museum.

Having a guide has been an important part of these visits, and with a group of around 20 people, someone will always ask question you wished you had thought of as not everyone feels comfortable raising questions.

Our winter programme keeps us busy with speakers and we've been using Zoom, which enabled us to arrange talks with people who are not in our area. I've more recently been involved in a pilot scheme with the National u3a where we can exchange speakers, material and presentations. This scheme helps to reduce the burden of preparing and researching topics and finding speakers, all within this swap scheme.

#### **The Annual Christmas Quiz**

The u3a has been a really good thing for me and Chris, we meet people with common interests and spend time with groups who are passionate about the topic, and there is always something going on. The costs are minimal and there is no pressure to do anything that your partner doesn't want to, with all the different



groups which include the monthly meetings with top quality speakers, an annual quiz and lots of social meetings, it is really a great way of spending your leisure time. Is there any other organisation that can give such a wide range of activities?

So, if you're winding down from work, looking for things to do, then I strongly recommend u3a as a wonderful organisation to be part of.

I would like to thank Brian, Chris, Mike and Howard for these excellent, informative transcripts and hope you find them useful when deciding which groups you may want to join. They have been published in the Maldon and Heybridge Life and on the Maldon Nub News on Facebook.

**Jo Madge (Interest Group Co-ordinator)**

## John Salisbury My Journey with the u3a

My career in education was based in North London including being the Head Teacher for 18 years of a school with more than 1500 students. After my first "retirement" a period of 4 years followed as an Education Consultant that took me to my second retirement.

Our son, Matthew, was now living in Dublin with his family and our daughter, Jane, had established her business in Maldon and was living in Great Totham. We thought about the next phase of our lives and decided that we needed to be close to Stansted Airport to allow easy access to Matthew. We knew Maldon quite well from our time visiting Jane and eventually after an extensive search found a new home that met our needs, very close to the centre of town.



Moving in to the area, and not knowing anybody, both Jennifer and I wanted to get to know people quickly and to find people with like-minded interests.

A neighbour came to see us with a flyer announcing a meeting at the West Maldon Community Centre to discuss forming a new u3a as all of the existing ones in the area were full and had waiting lists.

We went to the meeting together where we met Paul and Jo Madge, Brian Rivers, Chris Stringer, Ellaine Crome and others who formed a Steering Group. With the help of the other u3as in the area Limebrook u3a was formed and the first AGM was in April 2012. I was elected to the committee and shortly afterwards took on the role of Vice Chairman on the understanding that I would not become Chairman. At the 2022 AGM I decided to step down from the role, whilst remaining on the Committee.

The initial Interest Groups were formed and early on one of my interests led me to the start a group called "Spanish for English Holiday Makers" aimed at helping those wanting to either start or improve their language skills. Once a year I go to Barcelona for a week to study advanced Spanish to maintain and improve my skills.

We both joined the Social Science group as soon as it was established and when the person who started the group stood down, I took on the role. The Group has grown in size and become increasingly popular with members-

Theatre has always been a passion of mine and Limebrook has a thriving Theatre Group that goes to see shows in London and at the Cliffs in Southend. Each year we go to 4 or 5 shows and these trips often include a meal either before or after the performances. The coach trip to the venue gives people a chance to chat and it is a day out and a real event that our loyal following enjoy and look forward to.

During the Covid lockdown Limebrook u3a ran a "Keeping in Touch" project. By seeing people, delivering newsletters, setting up Zoom meetings, email and telephone, we were able to maintain vital contact with our friends and members. In fact, Limebrook's membership is now higher than before March 2020 and there are more active people involved than ever before. This is a remarkable achievement.

Several times a year the Social Group arranges trips, a Christmas meal and our Annual Quiz. The social side of Limebrook is a really important part of peoples' lives, especially those who live on their own. With so many interests and activities available there is something for everyone. Also, Jennifer is a member of the Music Appreciation Group as well as the Social Sciences and Theatre Groups and together we have made many friends- Recently a 10-pin bowling group has been meeting and I am slowly improving my averages.

Being part of the community was what we both wanted and as well as the u3a I am involved with the Maldon Film Club where we arrange a full range of films at the Maldon Town Hall. As the Publicity Officer, I promote the films and write articles for the Maldon Nub News.

When the Tourist information Office closed, I volunteered to help with the Maldon Visitor Information Centre. Recently I took Life Membership at the Essex County Cricket Club and in between all of my activities and interests have found my diary is always full.

Jennifer and I have no regrets about moving to Maldon and Limebrook u3a is a very important part of our lives. We have been able to meet with like-minded people and share interests and activities and have become good friends with many people.

We are both very pleased to be part of Limebrook, the friendly u3a and look forward to playing an active part in its continued growth and success.

