

HALTON NEWSLETTER

July 2026



Photo by courtesy of Ian Cank, Aerial Photography

Message from the Chair - Chris Lewis

This is the last introduction to the Newsletter I shall be doing as the next edition will be after the AGM on Thursday, 10th September 2026. The new Chair should be writing its introduction. Currently only Pol Clark has been proposed and seconded. If there are no other volunteers then she will be your next Chair. Similarly Margaret Sutton will be your Secretary. Jennifer and I are happy to be handing these roles over after being so involved with the running of Halton u3a for six years. The Constitution dictates I could do three years as Secretary then three years as Chair but no more. I agree with this rule as a new Chair and Secretary with different ideas will be good. We also have a member who has volunteered to join the Halton u3a committee at the AGM making seven members. The Constitution says we must have a minimum of six.

Regarding your Newsletter, Pat James has agreed to be editor of the Newsletters until the November edition. Halton u3a desperately needs a volunteer editor to be ready for 2027. Surely someone can do this? I think a regular Newsletter is so important to most members and I have seen organisations lose members and close due to the lack of a Newsletter.

We have lost a valued member of Halton u3a since the last Newsletter, David Findon, who died recently. He joined in late 2022 and became a committee member the following year and he knew how the u3a computer system, Beacon, worked. Not only that but he became a member of the u3a North West Committee and I am sure he made his opinions known, not always with the other members agreements I am sure. He will be sorely missed. It was standing room only for the crematorium service including twenty members of Halton u3a, most of whom went to the Cricket Club afterwards. I met his daughter, Helen, who was very grateful for the tributes she had received from Halton u3a including many I had passed on. I had informed Derek Twigg as I suspect they were councillors together many years ago and he had written to her which again she much appreciated.

What will Jennifer and I do in the future? My company that advised very large users of gas and electricity closes at the end of this month and we have stopped leading groups on railway holidays in Europe and India. We will continue to travel as long as we can, having been to France and Spain in May and Italy in June mostly by train. I will also continue to be Treasurer of the Locomotive Club of Great Britain.

Going back to Halton u3a, because more than £5,000 was handled by our bank account in 2025 we have to be a registered charity now. Pol Clark has spent a lot of time on this and we are now a registered charity. This requires certain policies to be in writing and Pol has written these and they will be on our website. These policies are also required now to be a branch of u3a.

Lastly for good accountancy practice your committee has decided the membership year is to be changed to match the financial year. Membership forms for the 2026/7 year will be circulated when available. Hopefully you will all re-join. We have had over 170 members joined/re-joined in the 2025/6 membership year, a target I set myself and the largest membership Halton u3a has had.

May's General Meeting - The Midas Men

Bernard Nevin gave one of our most interesting and enjoyable presentations. He spoke about the pivotal part that the talents of Brian Epstein and George Martin had played in the success of the Beatles. He concentrated on the very different backgrounds and early lives of both men and how they came together to transform the group. The photographs and Beatles recordings brought back many memories.

The Local Vocals Choir - Cath James, Halton u3a member

As a member of Halton u3a I thought I would share an upcoming event. I am a member of the Local Vocals choir and have been since last year. There are several choirs in the north and we have get togethers to help raise money for charity. On Saturday, 1st August 2026

we are doing a performance at Manchester's Bridgewater Hall to raise money for North West Cancer Research. There will be over 300 choir members performing in both a matinee and an evening performance along with an orchestra. It promises to be a great gig.

If anyone is interested in going you can obtain tickets on the link below. It would be great to see you there and thanks for reading.

<https://www.bridgewater-hall.co.uk/local-vocals-010826/>

Ever Fancy Writing Your Memoir? - Claire Heymans, Halton u3a member

Unlike an autobiography a memoir is a picture of a slice of your life. It emphasises emotion and reflection. It is your personal experience with a blend of story telling and emotions. You cannot only recount an event but interpret and reflect on it. If you think this could be for you why not give it a try? If you live in Liverpool City Region you are in luck. Two published authors take courses throughout the year. The courses last just twelve weeks and are held at the Kingsway Learning Centre in Widnes. The classes are informal and friendly. You will be guided and supported through every step of your journey. Towards the end of the course you will be given the opportunity to choose a cover for your 'book'. On completion you will get a certificate and a few weeks later your work will be in print and handed to you. All this is absolutely free of charge.

I have recently completed a course and can heartily recommend it. Details of this course and many others can be obtained from Kingsway Learning Centre - [0151 511 7788](tel:01515117788) or email adult.learning@halton.gov.uk Good luck!

P.S. At the time of writing dates for future courses have not been finalised but you can phone the number above if you're interested and they will take your details and will notify you when dates are finalised.

On the Grapevine - George Mullen, Halton u3a member

Most of us probably buy our wine from supermarkets who can source at low cost because of their size. Aldi is noted for selling decent wine at very reasonable prices but there are other retailers worth checking.

Novel Wines is based in Bath and sources wine worldwide including Mexico, Japan and Brazil. Trading under its clever name of Grape Britannia this is a wine shop and bar in Cambridge specialising in English and Welsh wine.

Naked Wines is an online retailer with an interesting business model. It operates in the UK, USA and Australia. Its customers, referred to as Angels, make monthly payments into their accounts and use the funds to pay for wine at times they choose. If they don't like the wine they've ordered their money is refunded. The business was part of Majestic Wine until 2019 and is described as operating on 'a direct-to-consumer basis funded by 500,000 Angels'. They support independent producers like Christian Patat in Italy who makes an excellent Appassimento. For me one negative is that an order must be for a minimum of

a six bottle case. I stopped buying cases a long time ago and now prefer researching to find something a little different.

The Little Fine Wine Company specialises in half bottles of fine wine. It was founded by Vicki Stephens-Clarkson who is one of just 409 Masters of Wine worldwide. Following a successful hospital visit recently I celebrated with a half bottle of Pol Roger. This was Winston Churchill's favourite Champagne and it's the best I've ever tasted well worth £27.50. If you have a winner at Haydock Park you could treat yourself to a half bottle of Antinori Cervaro della Sala 2023 from Umbria. This has been described as 'the flagship white wine of Italy' and is a barrel aged blend of Chardonnay and Grechetto. It's yours for the bargain price of £49.95. Generally harvesting is done using machines which remove whole bunches from the vine. Harvesting for fine wine is done manually when only the best grapes are selected. This is labour intensive, time consuming and requires experienced pickers. All this adds to the cost making fine wine more expensive to buy.

But don't exclude supermarkets. Calvet Muscadet Les Grezillieres 2023 is a dry white wine made with Melon de Bourgogne grapes in the west of the Loire valley near Nantes. It's highly rated. I haven't sampled it but I know a man who has. Recently it has been sold by Tesco priced £9 or £7.75 with a Clubcard. I've placed an order with my negotiant.

The Wine Society is based in Stevenage and is a non profit organisation established in 1874. A one time payment of £40 gives you life membership and access to an extensive range of wines and spirits. Members can order just one bottle including a half bottle for free delivery within a few days and often next day.

Wine shop names can be quite imaginative. The Great Grog Company is in Edinburgh, Bon Couer Fine Wines in Yorkshire, upmarket Hedonism in Mayfair and my favourite in Nottingham is called Slurp.

BTW. We know the world of wine is facing many challenges including climate change and changing social habits among younger age groups particularly GenZs. Now we have news of another. In the Toro wine region of Spain vineyards are uprooting vines. The farmers make a profit of about €700 per hectare. But the Government is offering them €2,000 per hectare guaranteed for 20 years if they make their land available for the installation of solar panels. Judging by all the new build on Lunts Heath Road and Derby Road our planet will soon be covered by them. Will planners ever see the light?

As I was writing this I was shocked by the sad news that David Findon had died. I nearly stopped writing but I know he would want me to continue. He was a wine enthusiast and we had many discussions on the subject. The last time I saw him was on a Pub Group evening visit when we shared a bottle of Merlot. He was still struggling to cope with the loss of his lovely wife Julie who died a few years ago. I knew him for over 50 years. He was a keen golfer and he introduced me to Runcorn Golf Club in 1978. David was a contributor and we need people like him. I'll miss him.

Years ago we only heard the word turkey mentioned at Christmas. But born in 1923 the country of Turkey has now become a popular holiday destination and, perhaps because of this, Turkish restaurants are familiar in our area. Even in Widnes. EFES Mezze is in Warrington Road in Halton View. EFES or Ephesus is an ancient city in Izmir province. In previous lives the restaurant was called FLAMES and then ALEV. Well before both of these it was Tommy MacDonald's burger bar.

When I visited EFES it was early evening and I shared the place with just a mum and dad and child. My soup took a long time to arrive which I thought was a good sign. It wasn't out of a can. But it was served in a large shallow dish which caused it to cool quite rapidly. It came with a plentiful supply of very nice bread. All I needed was two fish and I could have performed a miracle as in Matthew [14: 17-21](#). My Kavurma or lamb stew was excellent. Worth a visit but best to plan it carefully unless you're keen on belly dancing.

Another choice is Istanbul Restaurant in Lugsdale Road. It was good to see babaghanoush on the menu. It includes eggplant, tahini, garlic and lemon juice with optional extras. It originated in Lebanon but is popular throughout the Middle East. I've enjoyed this several times but for a change I opted for the simpler lentil soup as a starter. It came in a small bowl, warm but not hot, accompanied by a basket of bread not quite enough for a miracle plus a selection of olives and dips.

For the main course I had Ali Nazik which is lamb kebabs on a bed of smoked puréed eggplant with yogurt, vegetables and two kinds of rice. It all came on a huge plate which I nearly finished. I ended it all with a very nice yogurt drink.

It's an alcohol free zone but on Sunday to Thursday you can bring your own drink and there's no corkage. Considering the high and sometimes outlandish prices charged for alcohol by most eateries that's a big bonus. Our visit was in the afternoon and we were the only diners. Perhaps it does well in the evening. I hope it does. I'd like to go again.

The Sheesh is a Turkish BBQ restaurant in Duke Street in St Helens. It is sometimes misspelt as Sheeth meaning Seth who was the third son of Adam and Eve arriving after Cain had murdered Abel. Turkey is mentioned extensively in the Bible under its ancient name of Asia Minor. The restaurant's name doesn't refer to the prophet Seth but to the popular dish Shish Kebab. So far I haven't sampled the Turkish delights of St Helens but I have applied for a visa.

Blossom is a cafe bar in Warrington whose address is Dolmans Lane. Despite asking half the population of Warrington nobody had heard of such a place until Google Maps came to the rescue. A more appropriate address would be Bridge Street. The menu includes a Turkish Breakfast and they also serve Menemen which is a Turkish variation of Shakshuka with tomatoes, peppers, onions, garlic and a spicy sausage called sucuk. The eggs are scrambled instead of poached. It's my kind of food. I could happily become addicted so no cold turkey for me.

The Long and Short of it - George Mullen, Halton u3a member

There seems to be a worldwide obsession with height particularly regarding buildings. Currently the world's tallest at 828 metres is the Burj Khalifa in Dubai with 163 floors. Taipei 101, formerly known as the Taipei World Financial Centre, is the tallest building in Taiwan. When I was in Taipei I found it very convenient for finding my way around the city as I could always see it. Apart from that it was a bit of an eyesore. But towers are very popular.

Eiffel Tower in Paris

CN Tower in Toronto

Sky Tower in Auckland New Zealand

Shanghai Tower

Patronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur are the tallest twin skyscrapers in the world.

The Jeddah Tower in Saudi Arabia is currently under construction and will be the first building ever to exceed one kilometre in height. Of course we have Blackpool Tower which was once featured in a film called Dick Barton Strikes Back. And now we have The Shard which is the tallest building in Western Europe.

But this preoccupation with height is not totally confined to buildings. Some women seem to be attracted by height and have been heard sometimes describing a man as tall, dark and handsome. Well, I'm short and grey but OK on the rest. Only 14.5% of men in the US are over 6 feet tall. I'm not sure who measured them but they all walk and talk like John Wayne. I once sat near Tom Cruise at Wimbledon. At 5ft 7in I wasn't certain it was him until I watched the highlights on TV later. Alan Ladd in the 1940s and 50s was a big film hero but not really. He was only 5ft 6in. Joseph Stalin was 5ft 4in. Napoleon Bonaparte is a giant name in history but in fact he was just 5ft 6in. Originally he was mistakenly recorded as being 5ft 2in much to the amusement of the British who enjoyed exploiting this and annoying our friends across La Manche.

With some people it's not just height that matters but size generally. Everything in the city of Bucharest is big. The Palace of Parliament claims to be the third largest administrative building in the world after the Diamond Bourse in Surat in India and the US Pentagon in Arlington. I asked a local in Bucharest why everything in the city was large. He said it was because head of state Nicolae Ceausescu was small and he aspired to higher things.

We all know people who like to use long words when a short one will do. They are trying to impress but it doesn't work when they are talking to someone who is struggling to cope with hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia. Ironically this is a 36 letter term meaning a fear of long words. You can check the pronunciation on YouTube. It's not an official medical diagnosis and perhaps invented by someone with a cheeky sense of humour or just needing everything to be the biggest. I know several people like that. Remember Gracie Fields? She was the proud owner of the biggest aspidistra in the world.

Group Reports

- **iPad Group (Group Leader, Paula Fox)** - July's Apple workshop took us back to basics, which the group found very helpful, as there were quite a few things that we had forgotten. We were reminded to use the Tips app built in to your iPad and iPhone, which is full of everything about your Apple devices. Especially valuable is the User Guide. The information learned at Apple is revised and cascaded to other members at monthly follow-up sessions at Cronton Methodist Chapel Hall. Free car parking is opposite the chapel. Beginners are very welcome and we aim to learn just one new thing each session. A small charge for room hire is needed at Cronton Methodist Chapel Hall. Come along for a try out.
- **Crown Green Bowling Group (Group Leader, Paula Fox)** - Since last month, four new members have joined the Bowling Group and have been enjoying the challenges of this apparently easy game. The crown on the green, in combination with the bias of the bowls, create forces which make for exciting tactics and learned skills. Of course, luck plays its part too. See below for details. Don't be put off if you have never played before as you will receive a warm welcome and plenty of support and encouragement. There are bowls to borrow in various sizes and gorgeous colours, and professional coaching sessions are available. All you need are flat shoes and 50p for a cuppa in the clubhouse. No experience necessary, just a sense of humour. The bowling green is in Hough Green Park, Mayfield Avenue, Widnes, WA8 8PW. Park on the road. Meetings at the bowling green are 10.00am every Tuesday from 7th April 2026. It's the perfect thing for a bit of gentle exercise and friendly banter.
- **Bridge Group (Group Leader, David Burrows)** - The group meets every Thursday at 10.00am in Ditton Community Centre, Dundalk Road, Widnes WA8 8DF. We are a friendly group with all levels of bridge skills and welcome members new to bridge but familiar with whist. We have a library of tuition books free to borrow to get new players familiar with bidding and techniques.
- **Reading Group - (Group Coordinator, Anna Higgins)** - We continue to meet on the third Wednesday of the month on the ground floor of Widnes Library. Our last two reads were 'The Women' by Kristin Hannah and 'Small Great Things' by Jodi Picoult. Both books got a thumbs up from all group members and we would highly recommend them. The group is currently full but we are keeping a waiting list. Please contact the Reading Group Coordinator via the Halton u3a website if you would like to go on to the waiting list. If there are any keen readers out there who would be prepared to set up a second Reading Group we would be delighted to support you. Please let David Bissenden, Groups and Venues Coordinator know either at a General Meeting or through the contact page on the website if you would be interested in doing this.
- **Photography Group - (Group Leader, Maurice Clay)** - The group has had an up and down couple of months. We seem to be clashing with the Gardening or Walking Group meetings so we have changed our meeting day to a Friday on the third week of the month. We will still arrange visits in between these meetings.
- **History (Group Leader, Bob Roach)** - The group meets at St Paul's Church Hall, Widnes at 1.00pm on the first and third Tuesdays in the month. The last History

Group meeting in its present form will be the July meeting. Bob Roach is leaving the role as Group Leader. David Bissenden will be caretaker Group Leader until a new leader is elected in September. The Living History Group has not existed since the resignation of Geoff Dutton. David is hoping that the new History Group will include more walk/site visits when it is revamped in September, so will have more elements of Living History.

- **Science is for Everyone/Advanced Science Group** - This group has now been split into two different groups and continues to meet at St Paul's Church Hall, Widnes at 2.00pm. The Science for Everyone Group meets on the fourth Monday of the month and the Advanced Science Group on the second Monday of the month.

Bob Roach has decided that after many years he will no longer lead the Science Group. A member of the Science Group has agreed to lead it with the help of several members including Bob. Meetings should restart again in September.

- **Family History Group (Group Leader, Alec Hough)** - The group meets on the third Monday of each month from 2.00pm to 3.30pm in Room 11 at Widnes Library, Victoria Square, WA8 7QT. All members are welcome, no expertise is needed and you don't need to have started researching your family tree. If you'd like assistance in getting started with tracing your family history, we'll be happy to help. Our next meeting will be at 2.00pm on Monday, 20th July 2026.
- **Gardening Group - (Group Leaders, Chris and Colin McConnell)** - We meet at Rivendell Garden Centre, Widnes, WA8 3UL at 10.30am on the third Monday of the month. At our last meeting we had a discussion on moss and weeds, agapanthus and the growing of herbs. We also discussed jobs to do in June. The next meeting will be at 10.30am on Monday, 20th July 2026.
- **Cinema Group - (Group Leaders, Judith Byrne and Hazel Landon)** - We meet on a Tuesday afternoon at the Reel Cinema in Widnes when suitable films are available. Most tickets are £9.99 but there are often some Movie Magic films for £4.99. The Movie Magic films are normally screened before 1pm. Additionally they also host special screenings - Live Theatre, Royal Ballet and Opera. These are normally £15 or £12.50 if senior. The day and times vary.
- **Ten Pin Bowling Group (Group Leader, David Bissenden)** - The group meets at 10.00am each Wednesday at Widnes Super Bowl, apart from during school holidays. The next meeting will be on Wednesday, 15th July 2026 and will return in September after the school holidays. There is now a different price structure which oddly is cheaper. Typically two games of bowling for £6.00, then coffee and bacon sandwich are half price. Participants are responsible for their own fitness and ability to take part and should supply emergency contact details. Members interested can contact me through the website or just turn up.
- **Visits to Interesting Pubs (Group Leader, Chris Lewis)** - We have had two meetings since the last Newsletter, one at the Norton Arms and one at the Unicorn. The latter had eighteen attending. We now have thirty four members. The next venue will be the Society in Runcorn.

- **Walking Group (Group Leader, Rob James)** - Due to unavailability the walks in May and June did not follow our usual schedules. There was just one walk in May, a Thursday walk around Rainford. June saw an evening walk around Pex Hill Country Park where we managed to dodge the unseasonable summer weather. There was also a June walk around Croxteth Country Park.



- **Lunches and Outings Group (Group Leader, Patricia Quarton)** - .

Coffee Mornings - We meet on the second Tuesday of the month at Ma & Ja's, Albert Square, Widnes at 11.00am. The July coffee morning will be at 11.00am on Tuesday, 14th July 2026. The August meeting will be 11.00am on Tuesday, 11th August 2026.

Sunday lunch is usually on the third Sunday of the month. This sometimes changes to accommodate Mothers/Father's day. This month it's the Wonky Garden Open Day on Sunday, 19th July 2026 at Ditton Community Centre, Dundalk Rd, Widnes. I believe the gates open at 12.30pm and close at 4.00pm. Entry is £5 and tea, coffee and cakes are available. We are returning to La Cantina on Alford Street, Widnes, at 1.00pm on Sunday, 26th July 2026. The restaurant serves Mediterranean/Spanish food and their two course Sunday menu is £18.95 or three courses for £22.95. The servings are huge and I strongly recommend a doggy bag! We are back to the very popular Runcorn Golf Club at 1.00pm on Sunday, 16th August 2026, two courses for £20.00, three courses for £24.00

The brunch at Parklands is proving to be a popular event, so I'll keep it going. We meet on the last Friday of the month, the next will be at 11.00am on Friday, 31st July 2026. The August brunch will be 11.00am on Friday, 28th August 2026. When the schools return we will try the Catalyst Breakfast and Brew Club available every Thursday for over 50's. Cost is £5.00 I think.

If you would like to join an event please provide your mobile number and I will add you to the Lunches and Outings whats app group. I post polls asking people to vote if they are coming then I can make a reservation. Everyone is very welcome but please don't just show up as the venue may not be able to accommodate extra diners.

- **Jigsaw Swap and Chat Group (Group Leader, Pol Clark)** - Despite the sweltering heat that we experienced in late June, the Jigsaw Swap and Chat Group met as planned at the café in the Catalyst Museum Widnes.

Although we were missing some members due to holidays and other commitments, it didn't stop us from having a laugh, enjoying a good old natter and generally putting the world to rights.

The group is continuing to be a great success with members enjoying the opportunity to swap jigsaws that they have previously completed with new ones from other members of the group, whilst also enjoying socialising in a comfortable setting.

The meetings commence at 10am and run for about an hour and half and the next meeting is scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 28th July 2026. Please feel free to come along and join the group if you are able.

It should be noted that the jigsaws, whilst swapped at the meeting, are taken home to be completed by the members in their own homes, not at the venue. In addition, there is no pressure to complete jigsaws within a certain timeframe. It is a friendly, flexible group and members are able to complete the jigsaws in their own timeframe in line with their personal requirements.

For further information please contact the Group Leader, Pol Clark via the contact page on the website.

- **Board Game Group (Group Leader, Hilary Clay)** - The board game group is a small group of eleven people which is very enjoyable. The favourite game appears to be Rummikub (although we have lots of other different games) and has brought out the competitive side of everyone. We are at Widnes Library on the second Friday of every month at 10.30am until 12.30pm. All are welcome

Yoga for Well-Being

There is a session every Tuesday at 11.00am at the Frank Myler Pavilion, Liverpool Road. It uses slow, gentle flows and shifts the body out of fight mode. Gentle movements allow the body to naturally unwind and reduce stress. Contact Nikki on [07986576058](tel:07986576058).

If you are interested in any of our groups and would like further information, Leaders can be contacted through the contact page on the Halton u3a website, or you can contact our Secretary.

Next General Meeting and Coffee Catch-up

The July Coffee Catch-up meeting will be at 2.00pm on Thursday, 23rd July 2026 at Rivendell Garden Centre, Widnes.

The Runcorn Coffee Catch-up is mainly for members who live in Runcorn but open to others. These will continue to be held on the first Thursday of the month. Please contact David Bissenden via the website for details.

There will be no General Meeting in August. The September General Meeting will be the AGM starting at 1.30pm on Thursday, 10th September 2026. This will be followed by a short presentation by David Bissenden.

If members would like to give a presentation at a future event, or would like to contribute a short article to the newsletter, please contact our Secretary or send articles to the newsletter editor through the contact page on the Halton u3a website.

Please note the last date for contributions to the newsletter is the 10th of every other month, with publication a few days later. The Newsletter is published every two months. The next Newsletter will be published in September 2026.

Further information and contact details can be found on the Halton u3a website