

## **CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2017-18**

This report covers the period between the AGMs in April 2017 and 2018. At 13<sup>th</sup> April 2017 AGM, one new Committee member was elected, maintaining the number on the Committee at twelve, each of whom was allocated an area of responsibility. In addition, Alison Thomson stepped down as Vice-Chairman and was replaced by Margaret Brown.

During the course of the year, there were 12 General Meetings: 10 in the Corn Exchange and 2 in the United Church (when the Corn Exchange floor was being replaced). We learnt about TE Lawrence, George Cruikshank, the Gulf War, William Gill, women and the Great Western Railway, life in Ancient Egypt, the history of the Thames at London, the experiences of a theatre manager, the monologues of Stanley Holloway, the history of the VW Beetle and the life of local poet and author Alfred Williams. In addition, in the second January meeting, the Independent Cinema Office's recent film 'Coast and Sea' was shown.

On 18<sup>th</sup> May a 'Drinks and Nibbles' party was held in the Barber Rooms at All Saints Church. All group leaders were invited – to thank them for their hard work – as were members who had joined since October 2016. Between 40 and 50 attended this enjoyable and useful 'low-key networking' opportunity.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> August, thanks to Steve and Jenny Braithwaite's continuing generosity, we held our Summer Lunch which was attended by over 110 members - a recorder number. The night before was exceptionally windy and, on the morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, a certain amount of 'adjustment' to the gazebos erected the evening before was needed. However, when members started to arrive, the weather had much improved and all were able to enjoy excellent locally-sourced food, well-chosen wines and congenial company. The Recorder Consort and the Ukulele Group provided musical interludes.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> October our annual Open Day was held in the Corn Exchange. The event was well-publicised and attracted a good number of visitors – both existing members looking for new Groups to join and those considering joining our U3A; there was a real 'buzz' in the hall. New members were enrolled at the Open Day and, when the new subscription year commenced in January, there were even more recruits, bringing the total membership to almost 500.

On 12<sup>th</sup> January we had our blues-banishing 'January Japes' lunch in the Corn Exchange. A record number of diners – 105 – were entertained after lunch by tales of the Ramsbottom family (including Albert, their son).

We have continued to develop electronic communication with members this year. Although the use of paper forms and cheques for membership renewal is still entirely possible, renewal can be totally electronic using a simple online form coupled with a payment via internet banking or with a combination of the electronic form and a cheque. We've also continued to use both mass and selective e-mailing of members. For example, invitations to the May gathering was via e-mail, we were able to assess numbers for the Summer Lunch by means of an e-mailed 'response form' and we e-mailed reminders about the Open Day and the January lunch. We have also set up a system where members can receive early notification of Thames Valley Network events. The Committee has also been investigating the possibility of using the Third Age Trust's 'Beacon' system which could assist in all aspects of membership, monitoring and managing our finances and supporting groups.

The lifeblood of our U3A is, of course, its interest groups and the vigour of the organisation depends on encouraging the activity of its members. Some groups were 'wound up' during the year, but others have started. These include the Wine Appreciation Group, back 'under new management' after a six-

month break, a new Play-reading Group, a Qigong Group and an Art Group that has attracted so many that now two monthly sessions are run. The series of one-off Workshops has continued with sessions about how to be a safe on-line 'silver surfer', on 'migration and modern-day slavery' and a third on 'quilting'.

It's nice to report that we have featured nationally in 'Third Age Matters' on a number of occasions this year with the publication of another Cryptic Crosswords Group puzzle, reference to the Quilting Group's Faringdon panels and mention of novels published by two of our members.

This is my third and final annual report as Chairman and I would like to record my thanks to all of those who have contributed to the continuing success of our U3A during the past three years. The Committee have been terrific during my Chairmanship – they have put in a lot of effort into making things work efficiently and well with unfailing good humour. Group leaders continue to be at the heart of our U3A, providing its lifeblood – I am very grateful for all their hard work. Our Newsletter Editor, who is standing down after four years in the role, has, in my obviously unbiased view, unfailingly produced an attractive and informative document recording our activities and notifying members of what's on the horizon. She's also been a source of extremely good sense that has been invaluable to me these last three years. We must not forget the providers of refreshments at monthly meetings, those who helped to make our Summer Lunch such a success and all the people I've forgotten who contribute to our U3A.

I have enjoyed my three years as your Chairman and offer my successor all good wishes for the future.