

Chairman's Annual Report 2018 – 19

This report covers the period between the AGMs in April 2018 and 2019.

At the 2018 AGM held in the Corn Exchange on 12th April, Peter Smith stood down as Chairman after 3 years in the post and I was appointed Chairman. Alison Thomson was elected as Vice Chairman and we welcomed Danielle Mills to the Committee to maintain the number on the Committee at 12.

During the year there were 12 General Meetings all in the Corn Exchange. We learned about Alfred Williams, a local 19th century poet, author and historian, David Dalton talked about Life as An Author, Martin Lloyd entertained us with his talk on Passports, Assassins, Traitors and Spies and in June Jenny Mallin introduced us to her Grandmother's life in India through the old recipe book she had discovered. In July, Diz White spoke about her connections with the Cotswolds and Downton Abbey. Jennifer Cowling came in September to talk to us about her life and experiences in amateur dramatics. Brian Freeland made a welcome return with his presentation about George Bernard Shaw and to ring the changes, entomologist, Dr David Jones entertained us with his knowledge of rainforests and soil ecology. We have learnt how to take better photographs with Derek Gale and thanks to Tony and Rosemary Hadland we explored the flora and fauna of the Falkland Islands. We welcomed U3A member, Anthony Burdall in February who told us the story of his journey all round the British Isles in his yacht, Alcione. In March we are scheduled to welcome Dinah Reynolds from the Ashmolean museum who will talk about ceramics. In addition, in the second January Meeting, we showed another in the series from Britain on Film entitled Rural Life.

On Thursday 17th 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 all members who had joined since October 2017. Attendance was down slightly on the previous year, but those who attended were able to meet, share hospitality and enjoy a very pleasant get together.

On August 16th, thanks to Steve and Jenny Braithwaite's continuing generosity, we held our Summer Lunch, which was attended by 117 members. A big 'Thank You' to everyone who came the evening before for the set up and who stayed behind to tidy up afterwards. We were in the lap of the gods as to what the weather would do, and indeed it did rain on the morning of the lunch, but by midday the skies had cleared, and the sun shone. It was a thoroughly enjoyable afternoon with fabulous food, well-chosen wine and very congenial company. Music was provided by the Ukulele Group and the Recorder Consort and we all tested our 'green' knowledge with a table quiz provided by Jenny Braithwaite.

On October 2nd our Annual Open Day was held in the Corn Exchange. The event was well-publicised and attracted a good number of visitors. Existing members were able to peruse the tables and find out about groups that they might be interested in joining and lots of

people were on hand to welcome visitors hoping to join. On the day, 19 new members were signed up bringing the membership to over 500. We are hoping to maintain a similar number once everyone has decided if U3A is for them and we look forward to welcoming all members to activity groups, general meetings and special events throughout the year.

On January 10th we banished the winter blues with our January Japes lunch in the Corn Exchange, where 95 of us gathered to enjoy a delicious lunch followed by the fascinating travel talk from Tony and Rosemary Hadland.

The Committee were faced with two major issues this year when we had to write policies for GDPR and Safeguarding. This proved to be very time consuming and complex, but, thanks to the dedication of the IT Coordinator and his little workforce, we are now compliant with both and the policies can be found on our website. It was decided this year to upgrade our U3A computer and a lapel microphone was also purchased to meet the needs of some of our speakers who need to be hands-free. IT plays an important role in our U3A especially for renewing memberships, passing on information, for example from the Thames Valley Network and making contact, but yet the Beacon system which Peter wrote about last year is still under consideration. For those without IT access we also offer a more traditional means of communicating. Contact details for Committee Members and Group Leaders can be found in the Newsletter.

We are a thriving U3A with over 40 interest groups. Thanks to the continued hard work of the group leaders our members can enjoy old favourites or be adventurous and try something new. Some groups have grown so much that they have made extra sessions available, some will be venturing far and wide in pursuit of furthering their knowledge and experience and some prefer to stay closer to home.

My personal thanks go to the Committee whose support is invaluable. Peter Foot decided that he would, after all continue his role as the representative for Thames Valley Network, for which I am very grateful, and of course I must thank the Newsletter Editor, who has taken over the reins to produce an informative and interesting publication. My thanks also go to the outgoing Chairman for the time he spent making the transition seamless. Finally, I would like to thank all those who have stepped up to the mark and provided refreshments each week, all those who worked so hard to make the Summer Lunch and January Japes the successes that they were and to everyone who plays a part in making our U3A the enjoyable, worthwhile and valuable organisation that it is.

There has been a lot to learn, but as my first year as your Chairman is coming to an end, I believe that it has been a success.

With very best wishes.

Margaret Brown