

Chairman's Message

This report covers the period between the AGMs in Summer 2020 and Spring 2021.

The AGM for the period April 2019 to July 2020 was of necessity completed online and with a postal option and took place within the permitted time of 15 months between AGMs. The Annual Report was completed and posted online as well as a draft copy published in the Spring Newsletter. The Accounts were audited, signed off by the Committee and the Annual Return sent to the Charities Commission, fulfilling our Constitutional obligations. The online voting was finalised on June 30th 2020. The results were published on our website and in the Summer Newsletter. We are extremely grateful to Ricky, Liz and Roger for doing all the organisation and administration to make it happen especially as it was a new venture for our U3A team. There were no new appointments this year and the Committee remained the same. Thank you to everybody who voted.

In May, we decided to try something that has now become very much a part of our everyday lives at U3A namely a trial Zoom for our Committee meeting. Again, we looked to our IT department for technical wizardry and again they did not let us down. Our first meeting was very successful and we decided that for the time being this would be our way forward. Nearly one year on and we are still using Zoom not only for Committee Meetings, but also for our Thursday monthly meetings and by groups who are able to continue to meet online.

The Zoom boom quickly took off and speakers contacted Shela with a view to coming to our Thursday meetings but we decided to ask Valerie Calderbank to be our guinea pig. Her talk about the night sky was very informative and well suited to Zoom. In August we looked to Danielle to lead the way with her most interesting talk about Medical Detection dogs. This was a huge success and lots of people took up the challenge of Zoom and discovered how wonderful it is to see people we hadn't seen for weeks and to know they were keeping well. By September we were ready to branch out, and an old friend of Faringdon U3A, Ian Keable returned with his talk: The Art of Trickery. In October we welcomed Paul Colley talking about marine environment and illustrated with his own amazing photography. Debbie Evans introduced us to her Jack Russell, Rolo, who is the inspiration for all her books for children. In December, Dr Francis Burroughs introduced us to the wonders of glass, showing us some really remarkable examples of ancient glass from his own collection. In January 2021, Jessica Beere from the Vale of the White Horse District Council, attracted the largest following on Zoom of all our speakers so far as we logged on to hear her talk about what happens to our kerbside recycling. Obviously passionate about her subject, Jessica informed and delighted us with her knowledge and enthusiasm and she answered all 16 questions with fortitude. As a result we decided to upgrade our Zoom subscription so that no-one need be disappointed. In February we welcomed Faringdon and District U3A member, Mike St Maur Shiel, who took us on a tour of WW1 battle sites inspired by his exhibition, Fields of Battle, Lands of Peace. In March we look forward to meeting Doctor Richard Fisher with his talk entitled Three Choirs and a Reformation: The Cathedrals of Hereford, Gloucester and Worcester under Henry VIII. We are very grateful to all our speakers this year and to Shela and Danielle for organising such a wide range of subjects and providing write ups for the Newsletter so that we can be reminded of what we have heard or read about what we have missed. We hope there is something to interest everybody.

This year the Committee, decided to buy into the Third Age Trust administration system called Beacon. It is now up and running and has been particularly helpful; to Ricky and Liz as they processed our renewals and in time, to group leaders for organising group information. Training is being organised for group leaders and I am grateful to Neal and Ricky for getting this started.

Sadly, this year we have not been able to meet face to face so instead of thanking our group leaders and new members at our June coffee morning, I am doing it now. A big thank you to the group leaders who have been able to keep their groups active and I know that many groups who have found this lockdown difficult have remained hopeful that U3A will be able to resume normal meetings once Covid has been controlled. My thanks also go to the new members who, inspite of all the difficulties have decided to give U3A a try...welcome! We are all in this together. In August we would normally have met for our Summer Lunch and it saddened us all not to be able to this year. The Open Day and January Japes had to be cancelled for this year too, but we look forward to the time when we will be able to share hospitality again.

Following the success of our online AGM last year, we have decided to do the same this year. We are still unlikely to be able to use the Corn Exchange as it looks probable that we will be in lockdown or at least, have restrictions on group gatherings by the time of our April meeting. Please see Roger's letter of explanation on the next page.

In this very difficult year, my personal thanks go to the Committee whose support is invaluable. Everyone has their own part to play but will also step up to the mark when it is needed. I must thank the Newsletter Editor, who continues to produce an informative and interesting publication. He is always on the lookout for photographs for the covers of the Newsletter, so if you can help please feel free to send them to him.

I have nearly completed my third year as your Chairman and it has been a privilege, but now, according to the Constitution, I will be standing down. Nigel has also expressed the desire to stand down. Nigel has been an outstanding Treasurer and it has been an honour to work alongside him. He leaves with our most grateful thanks. You still have time to propose our replacements and for U3A to keep going we need both of these officers on the Committee. It means that at the AGM 2021 we need to have found my replacement, a new Treasurer and following her recent resignation, a new Programme Co-ordinator to work with Shela. Danielle has decided that her work with Medical Detection Dogs must take priority and those of us who heard her talk, realise how passionate she is working for this charity and we wish her well. I am most grateful for everything she has done to support the work of the Committee. Geoff will also be relinquishing the reins at the Newsletter desk. I have always looked forward with interest to his choice of photographs either from his collection or from donations. If you can help to keep our U3A alive and thriving, please come forward.

Whoever steps up to the challenge of the Chairman's seat, I can assure you an interesting and enjoyable three years and I wish my successor, and all who join the Committee, a happy and rewarding time.

In the meantime, remember to Learn, Laugh and Live

With Very Best Wishes

Margaret Brown

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