

Draft Chairman's Annual Report 2021 / 22

This report covers the period between the AGMs in Summer 2021 and Spring 2022.

The AGM for the period April 2020 to July 2021 was once again completed online, 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 and the results were published both 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 we had not, at that time, returned to the Corn Exchange. There were no new appointments during the year and the Committee remained the same. Thank you to everybody who voted.

Since last year's AGM, there have been two changes to the Committee. Shela has been joined by Tessa Timms in Programme Planning, and Tessa is also bravely standing up to take over from Geoff as the Newsletter editor. Liz Cunningham has decided to stand down as Membership Secretary and we welcome Carol Jones, who has been shadowing Liz and like Tessa will be voted in at the AGM unless there are more candidates willing to put their names forward. I am extremely grateful to both Tessa and Carol for their enthusiasm and willingness to become part of the team and am sure they will enjoy their time working with all the members of the Committee. We also welcomed two new group leaders this year and many thanks go to David Dalton who now leads the Poetry group and to Dusty Miller for taking over leadership of the Scrabble group. As always, details can be found either on the website or in the News from the Groups section later in the Newsletter.

To begin with this year, we stayed in the safety of our own homes and used Zoom for our meetings. In June we welcomed back Dr David Jones talking about earthworms and in July, Sarah Somerville spoke about her work at Shaw House, near Newbury. We were all very disappointed that the Summer Lunch had to be cancelled again, but with high levels of infection in the area it was deemed prudent to wait awhile. By September many u3a members had been called forward for their boosters, and it was splendid to get back to the Corn Exchange in person for a 'hybrid' meeting, proving just how important our meetings are when it is safe to hold them face to face. Following a practice session where we tested out the technology, our speaker, Alison Mees, spoke passionately, via a Zoom link, of her time in Africa, following her dream, and how photography enhanced her work in conservation. We were pleased that the IT worked well and her talk was relayed to members at home and in the Corn Exchange. The technical gremlins hit us in October and David Allen's talk could not be shown on our screen, so we gathered round the u3a laptop and listened, spell-bound, to the gruesome story of the Murder of Mrs Julia Martha Thomas, not really bothered by the technical difficulties, we were hooked. We were able to hold our Open Day in October, and were pleased to welcome a steady trickle of visitors. Thanks to Neal for organising this very successful morning. November saw us welcoming our first 'live' speaker, Polly Vacher, who delighted us with the adventure of the Donkeython, and how her two donkeys, Muffin and Wizard managed the 227 mile trip from Oxfordshire to North Wales. In December Andy Smith talked to us about Wartime and Romance with examples taken from his own family history. In January we were so pleased to welcome back Jenny Mallin with more of her tales from India. Sadly, no January Japes but we are now holding out great hopes that 'March Merriment' will take its place for this year and that we will

be once again meeting face to face. 'Omicron' virus had emerged over the winter and yet again we were dealing with the unknown. We are keeping our fingers crossed that the February meeting will be the last on Zoom, and that we can, with caution, go forward.

I reported last year that the Committee had 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 was provided for group leaders, and I am grateful to Neal and Ricky for getting this organised. I think for those attending, it was a very worthwhile exercise. Thank you to everybody who navigated their way through it and renewed their membership using our new system.

Unfortunately, this year we were unable 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, despite all the difficulties have decided to give u3a a try...welcome! We are all in this together.

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 front cover of the Newsletter, so if you can help, please feel free to send them to him. Tessa also will bring a new approach to the publication and we all wish her well.

After a one-year extension, when both Nigel and I continued in our roles on the Committee, I really have now reached my 'sell by' date and must stand down. We have been asking for volunteers for two years now and no one has taken up the call. You still have time for u3a to keep going as it is vital that the Committee has a Chairman and Treasurer. Someone who knows about Faringdon and the u3a would be perfect.

WE ARE IN A VERY REAL DANGER OF CLOSURE

Whoever steps up to the challenge of the Chairman's seat, I can assure you an interesting and enjoyable three years and will of course provide my full support during the transition. I wish my successor a happy and successful time in the chair.

In the meantime,

Remember to Learn, Laugh and Live

With Very Best Wishes and Farewell

Margaret Brown

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