

## U3A CHAIRMAN'S REPORT, OCTOBER 2000.

I am sure you will agree that the seventh year of Chester has built on the ongoing success of previous years. Membership numbers rose to reach 417 in August 2000; and we continue to hear many comments expressing members' appreciation of our varied activities.

A year ago we were just settling in to our new venue in Upton; though we realised that this was less convenient for some members, it is the only available premises capable of accommodating our increased numbers at our monthly meetings. Our attempt to provide a bus to make access easier for those who live in other parts of the city unfortunately had to be abandoned, as the small numbers travelling could not justify the considerable expense of the bus hire. Nevertheless, numbers attending the monthly meetings continued to increase, and as the fire safety limit for the hall stands at 200, we are continuing to monitor the numbers attending; so far there have not been more than about 175. It is partly for this reason that the committee has decided to limit the membership in future to 450. Knowing that no larger venue was available, we have done our best to improve the facilities here, buying a new screen and projector, and improving the blinds; we are indebted to Cecil Wright for the many hours of his time, and the many facets of his skills, which this has entailed.

It is important to remind ourselves however that the essence and distinguishing feature of the U3A movement is the Study Groups. Interesting and instructive as our monthly lectures undoubtedly are, it is first and foremost in the groups that we achieve our aims, primarily educational, but also social and leisure. Three new groups have been formed in the course of the year: Geology, Singing for Pleasure, and Wine-making (though this last one is in need of further members). Unfortunately we have lost one group, particularly regrettable as Travel and Gardening had had such a long and successful run. The sad and sudden death of John Olford deprived the Philosophy group of its leader, and we are grateful to Maia Lord and Alan Coulson for keeping the group going. The number and variety of groups do not seem to have increased at the same rate as our membership, and we hope this may be remedied during the next year. It is good to see that several groups are making increasing use of the excellent resources available for group use from the Third Age Trust in London, simply for the cost of one-way postage.

Mary Vives, Barbara Wright and helpers have continued to provide us with a varied programme of outings to destinations near and far; members will remember the Electric Mountain, Shropshire, and Norton Priory among others, while more farflung have been the trip to Edinburgh and the 'Britannia', and the highly successful weekend in Reims which included a day in Fontainebleau and visits to the champagne cellars. Neither should we forget the visits to opera, theatres, and the ballet. Another enjoyable occasion was our annual Christmas luncheon.

~~This year has also seen some 'first-time' occasions.~~ All groups contributed accounts of their activities for our

'Millenium Document', which is now ready for final typing and preparation for production by computer. We have also held a competition for Creative Writing in memory of Roy Wilson, a founder-member of Chester U3A, who also helped found many others throughout the country; we hope that the Roy Wilson Prize, won this year by Ida Turley, may become a regular event on our programme. Late 1999 also saw the first Chester U3A Calendar, produced by the Calligraphy group, and their 2001 calendar is available from today.

All I have said so far may give the impression of a rather inward-looking organisation, but we have had wider contacts. You have been represented at all meetings of the Merseyside & W.Cheshire region of U3A's, and at a meeting of the Northern Area, held in Lancaster. We did not however send a delegate to the National Conference at Norwich in September, but under new rules did register our votes by proxy, entrusting them to the delegates from Huyton. The National U3A Study Days were held at Chester College in July, involving several of our members either as students or in a variety of other capacities.

We have had still wider contacts, eloquently described by Eric Hutchinson in a letter to 'The Standard'. A group of 35 German pensioners, spending ten days in Chester in order to find out more about life in Britain, spent a day at St.Mary's Centre with U3A members from the German group together with other German-speaking members; we had a most interesting time discussing matters as varied as pensions, leisure time, the Euro and immigration, and in the afternoon were joined by the newly-formed Singing for Pleasure group for a session of songs in German and English. It was felt that the day was highly successful, and there are hopes that the contacts made may be ongoing.

An important part of any annual report must be the expression of thanks to all who have contributed to the activities of the year. The list is long -- as indeed it must be in an organisation which is essentially 'self-help'.

Committee, espec. Brenda Walker, now resigning from c'ttee.

John as Treasurer & Mary as Vice-Chaiman

Secretaries Frances & Julienne

All involved in smooth running of Monthly meetings --

Cecil for finding yet more speakers, all of interest

Chair & equipment teams, Coffee Makers espec Alison

Parking & Noticeboard (Laura & Mike Bishop)

Dorothy for coping with post from box number

Harold & Sylvia Wilson for printing newsletter & Watersts

Group Co-ordinators, and Groups Liaison Officers (Brenda, Jo and Gordon)

Eric Hutchinson, (Accounts Examiner).

Ruth Callaway and Helen Parker, (judges for the Roy Wilson Prize).

Everyone for support and enthusiasm. U3A belongs equally to all of us, and **depends** on each of us.