

CHESTER U3A CHAIRMAN'S REPORT, OCTOBER, 2001.

The year 2000 – 2001 has been yet another highly successful year for Chester U3A. Our numbers have increased yet again, reaching in August the total of 450, the number at which the committee had regretfully decided to set the limit, since Upton Village Hall can accommodate no more than 200 for the monthly meetings. It is sad that the success of our organisation should in itself cause a problem, but such is the lack of available meeting halls in Chester.

Not only have our membership numbers increased, but so have the number of study groups, bringing to over forty the range of topics. Newly formed groups include Photography, Storytelling, Industrial Heritage, Design from Experience, Birdwatching II, and Literature III (who wish to be known as the 'Reading Group'). In addition, David Else has arranged for many members to learn basic computing skills at the centre in Blacon. We are deeply indebted to our group co-ordinators for all their work enabling us to learn, share, and enjoy. The groups form the essential character of U3A; we are indeed fortunate to have so many loyal and devoted leaders, and Gordon's work as overseer and encourager has proved invaluable.

That our monthly meetings are so successful is of course largely due to Cecil Wright's amazing ability to find for us such interesting and varied speakers. Topics this year have again ranged widely, from Coniston to Pakistan, from the Grosvenor Bridge to the Royal Society and Cheshire Gardens, from Ballet to Preventing Falls. We are indebted also to the valiant army of volunteers who contribute faithfully to our enjoyment of our monthly meetings by moving chairs and equipment, welcoming visitors and new members, making coffee, helping us park our cars – and in so many other ways.

Mary Vives, Barbara Wright and helpers have again given us many opportunities to widen our horizons and explore both near and far, constantly finding fascinating new venues to attract us. We have for example been to the Loire Valley and the Chronicle Printworks, to see the Well-dressing in Derbyshire and the Catalyst and Glass Museums, to see 'Carmen' in Liverpool and 'Giselle' in Manchester. Our lives are much enriched by their efforts.

New this year, to the best of my knowledge, have been short breaks organized by study groups: the Environmentalists have been to the Brecon Beacons area; the Birdwatchers spent five days by the Solway Firth; several of the Spanish group put their skills into practice in Spain. Such trips have proved most successful in combining both the educational and the social aims of U3A.

The Roy Wilson Prize for Creative Writing has again been offered; attracting ten entries, it was won this year by Pam Pederson, with Howard Sherman in second place.

A 'one-off' achievement this year has been the completion of our 'Millennium Document', compiled to give a picture of our organisation, and incidentally of the society in which we live, at the turn of the century. The prime, bound copy was deposited in the Cheshire County Archives at a short ceremony in May, and photocopies are available for sale to members.

We have again taken our part in the wider U3A scene. Our representatives have attended all committee meetings of the regional organisation, and approximately twenty members went to the Regional Conference in Bebington; there we were impressed by the presentation on the wide variety of study resource material available on loan from the Third Age Trust. The few groups which have used these resources have been impressed by them, and I would urge others to explore them. Co-ordinators might also seek support from the national Networks which exist for many subjects.

It is always sad to lose members, and particularly so when death is the cause. I must here mention the deaths of Margaret Wooltorton, a founder member who contributed so positively to the life of several groups, and also of Joyce Williams. Joyce was an enthusiastic member, whose family showed their appreciation of the role of U3A in her life by making a generous donation; with this we have purchased an epidiascope, which has already been found useful by various groups.

As a Chairman making an annual report, I must express thanks on behalf of all members to so many people, in addition to those already mentioned, who contribute to the life of Chester U3A. Our deepest gratitude is surely due to John Turley for all his work as Treasurer and as co-ordinator of our Newssheet; we benefit also from his membership of the Education Committee of the Third Age Trust, which keeps us in touch with national thinking, and ensures that our 'grassroots' views are expressed in London when need be. We must also thank all members of our own committee, each of whom contributes particular skills to the smooth running of our U3A. Our secretaries, Frances and Julienne, deserve my special thanks for keeping me more or less efficient. I should like to thank, too, Dorothy for handling post coming through the box number, Brenda Walker for dealing with membership enquiries, Eric Hutchinson for acting as Accounts Examiner, Helen Parker and Ruth Callaway for judging the Roy Wilson Prize entries, Harold and Sylvia Wilson for printing the newsletter and taking it to the bookshops. We are surely all acutely aware of how dependent we are on the goodwill of other members to ensure the success of our organisation, and we do thank all who help for their contributions and enthusiasm.

Lastly, I want to thank everyone for making my two years as Chairman so enjoyable. Time has flown, and I have been much encouraged by everyone's friendship and support. I hope that Gordon, as your new Chairman, will derive equal enjoyment and satisfaction, and I give him every good wish for his term of office.