

CHESTER U3A CHAIRMAN'S AGM REPORT - 1ST NOVEMBER 2005

I think it is fair to say that the past year has been a very eventful one. The resignation of Chairman Howard Sherman in April meant that I took over the Chairmanship a full eight months earlier than expected. And then there was sudden loss of our long time Treasurer John Turley, who had a severe stroke while on holiday in Scotland in June. I am extremely grateful to Past Chairman Gordon Bowyer, who immediately volunteered to join the Committee, and take over as Acting Treasurer. He has done a magnificent job of producing the full set of accounts, you have before you.

The collaboration between Chester U3A and Bishop' Blue Coat High School has born fruit, in that the school has hosted and funded a PowerPoint course, the first in a series of very successful Popular Science Lectures and a Generating Ideas Day for our Science related Groups. I would like to thank Howard Sherman for all the hard work he has put in, both setting up the collaboration and in preparing and running the courses.

The size of our U3A has continued to grow, rising to 605 this year. While the number of members has enabled us to establish over 50 Study Groups, covering a wide range of interests, there is a problem in that we have nearly reached the capacity of St. Columba Church Hall, and there isn't a larger venue available to us in Chester. It has also led to a heavy workload for the Membership Secretary and the Treasurer, which is why the Committee is recommending that future membership be restricted to 600.

It also became clear, there was a need for another U3A here in Chester, and I would like to congratulate June Hargreaves and Gordon Bowyer for helping to set up a new one called the Cestrians. They are now completely independent and already have over 80 members and 11 groups.

We are now in our thirteenth year and many of our groups have been running for a long time, often with the same membership, which is a tribute to the Group Co-ordinators for making them both interesting and entertaining. However, there is some frustration, especially among new members, that many of the groups are full. And Group Liaison Officer Joan Hall will shortly be holding a meeting to help them find groups with vacancies and also encourage them to set up and lead new groups themselves.

On behalf of all our members I would like to thank the Group Co-ordinators for the time and effort they put into running their groups. They are the backbone of the U3A, and without them we would not exist.

This year, The Third Age Trust decided to run a Summer School North here in Chester, in addition to the one they have run for some years at Cheltenham. This took place from 28th June to 1st July at the Cheshire College, and in addition to providing tutors for three of the courses, we welcomed members as they arrived, manned the registration desks, and, as there are no lifts in the student accommodation blocks, helped those less mobile with their luggage. This looks as though it is to become an annual event, as another has already been booked for 11th to 14th July next year and undoubtedly we will be asked to help out again.

Cecil Wright is to be congratulated for the quality of speakers at our Monthly meetings. The standard continues to be as high as ever. Topics included everything from our finances to a sing-a-long and concluded, with what for me was the high spot of the year, our own Neil Fitton's "An Owdham Ruffied – Growing up in a Lancashire Cotton Town" taking us back to memories of the 1940's and 50's.

The only hiccup we had during the year was when the laptop computer refused to talk to the digital projector, and the speaker had to continue with only his notes. In spite of the best efforts of Gordon Bowyer, the laptop could not be fixed and a new one together with PowerPoint software had to be purchased. All was not lost however, as Gordon managed to set up the old computer to produce presentation CD's.

Whilst talking about Monthly Meetings, I must not forget Alison Wright and the Groups that serve us with tea, coffee and biscuits, or the band of volunteers who set out the chairs and put them away afterwards. Well done all of you

The ladies who run Social Events continue to amaze us with the range of activities they put on. In addition to the usual visits to theatres and places of interest, these now include 5-day holidays in Europe and here in the United Kingdom. The Sunday at Seven evening meals continue to be well supported, taking us to restaurants we might never normally visit. And where would we be without the highly successful Christmas lunches at Rossett Hall.

The number of our members using the Internet continues to increase and around 150 receive the News-Sheet by email. A further 40 are registered on an 'Information Only' basis which allows them to receive news between the Monthly Meetings. If you would like to be added to either of these services please send me an email. This will ensure that I get the correct email address.

Finally, I would like to thank the Committee for all their hard work and the support they have given me during the past year. Sadly we lost John Turley through illness; he had been our Treasurer for 9 years. Also leaving are Cecil Wright, who is resigning after being on the Committee since 1994, most of the time as Speaker Finder, our Committee Secretary Julienne Collingridge after 6 years and Group Liaison Officer Val Ryder who has served for two years. I shall miss them all.

Thank You, Alex Davis – Chairman