

## Chester U3A Annual Report - 6<sup>th</sup> November 2011 - Andrew Cross

Over the past year Chester U3A has continued to grow and successfully deliver the many shared learning opportunities that typify the U3A movement. The activities have been many and varied and the few examples I have room for in this report only just scratch the surface.

During the year our membership reached 843, an increase of 51 from 2010/11 with 144 members joining for the first time. The lunches for new members held in January & February proved very popular and some of those who attended are now making important contributions by becoming group coordinators and joining the social team. We will repeat lunches for new members again in the coming year.

Our U3A has 3 main threads of activity: Study and Interest Groups; Monthly meetings and the Social Programme.

There are now over 70 study and interest groups including quite a few that have started in the last 12 months (Cycling, Film History, Knitting, Literary Appreciation 2, Painting 2 & Psychology 2) and recently Digital Photography, Healthy Living, Philosophy and Current Affairs. Groups are the bedrock of Chester U3A, each pursuing their topic or activity giving the members mental and physical exercise along with some excellent social interaction. The Group Fair held in November proved to be a sell out with stalls packed into St Columba's Hall and an eye opener on all the activities that go on. A special thank you to all the co-ordinators who do such a wonderful job. If it wasn't for you, groups wouldn't exist and groups are what the U3A is all about. Keep up the good work, share your experiences and maybe when members see how rewarding it is they too will want to be co-ordinators.

Sheila Young has done a fine job in helping new groups start up over the 2 years she has been Group Liaison Officer and it is our loss that she is unable to continue for another 2 years. Many thanks from all group members & co-ordinators, Sheila.

The Tuesday and Thursday monthly meetings have been well attended with over 200 members on most Tuesdays and between 60 & 100 on Thursdays. The decision to have a meeting on the second Thursday even when it falls in the same week as the Tuesday meeting has been successful and will continue. Our thanks go to Sue Kettle and Myra Bowyer for arranging such a varied and educational range of speakers. My most memorable times were being dressed in Mongolian horseman's clothing to illustrate a winter journey through the Gobi desert and then one Thursday coming face to face with birds of prey from a rescue centre. I am sure every member will have their own memorable times from these meetings over the year.

The third aspect of our activities is the social programme which in the past year has seen: visits to theatres to see both musicals and plays; to concerts; tours of historic houses and a variety of museums plus some lovely trips on Cheshire canals. There were also two longer trips, one to the Floriade and other sights in the Netherlands and then a 4 night stay to explore the Torbay area. Altogether I make it around 40 activities on the social programme in the last year, plenty to keep us occupied. The Social Team organising all this is undergoing big changes. June Irwin had to give up during the year and Mary Vives & Barbara Wright are standing down now. We owe them all a big thank you. It is amazing to think that Mary has been running social activities for us for almost as long as our U3A has existed and Barbara just a few years less. I hope they enjoy plenty more U3A activities now, but without the weight of being organisers on their shoulders.

Throughout the year our U3A was active in local, regional and national U3A events. The Deeside and Wirral Network was busy hosting a half day for co-ordinators of History and Literary groups and in May ran an excellent Waterways event at the National Museum in Ellesmere Port. Jenny Carley, the Network Chair, along with a team of members from Chester and other U3As ensured there was a large number of activities to do around the canal theme. Our members also participated in the Regional Easter School, Science Day and training events for Committee members.

All the 3 strands of activity could not take place as successfully without a well developed infrastructure. There are well over a hundred roles (I counted 122 including group coordinators) being fulfilled to make our U3A function so it is difficult to thank everyone individually. This year I would like to mention finance, membership, communication and refreshments.

Our Treasurer David Kent is retiring at the AGM after 6 years of successfully operating our accounts. He has ensured we spend the money wisely and leaves the accounts in good condition. As our U3A grows we get more income from subscriptions but need to spend more on servicing the growing membership's needs. This year Peter Sumption has helped by dealing with all the money for hire of halls for group use. Our thanks go to David for all his efforts as Treasurer.

The membership system for renewals and new members ensures everyone gets a new card, welcome document and up to date booklet of group activities as quickly as possible. This takes a lot of careful work by the Membership Secretary Pat Gifford and her team as well as a large number of stamps & envelopes. With the numbers for 2012/13 already past 820 we expect similar growth in numbers as 2011/12.

Communication is a challenge for a large U3A. The News Sheet and web site deliver up to date information on all the activities to our membership. The editors Barbara Ginty and Tom Clarke produce monthly issues and rely on members sending in all the news and announcements, so keep them coming. The web site [www.chesterU3A.org.uk](http://www.chesterU3A.org.uk) is our other resource of instantly available information for which we have to thank John Hammond.

Shared learning is obviously thirsty work! At our many meetings tea and coffee are much appreciated, so thanks to all those who brew and serve, especially Brenda Smith who has organised the monthly meeting catering for the past 6 years.

Finally we should recognise the valuable contribution made by so many who there has not been time to mention individually. The committee, the many co-ordinators, meeting organisers, welcoming committee, help desk team, volunteers who put out chairs, open up the hall, provide the visual aids, maintain the notice boards, trade lists, equipment lists, run the book swap and those who count us in. Those who organise special events like Popular Science, group fair, co-ordinators meeting, new members lunch, Christmas lunches and all the volunteers that make our U3A work.

Andrew Cross, November 2012