



Chester U3A



Annual Report 2012/13

In 2013 Chester U3A reached the milestone of 20 years since being founded in September 1993. Over that time membership has grown consistently and along with it our activities have blossomed through a wide range of Study & Interest groups successfully delivering the shared learning experiences that typify the U3A movement. Some 300 members came together in September to celebrate the 20th anniversary with a review of past years, talks on historic Chester and musical entertainment. It was good to welcome some of the original founding members to these events.

During the year our membership reached 920, an increase of 77 from 2011/12 with 188 members joining for the first time. The get together for new members held in January proved very popular with a chance to meet everyone over lunch and find out more about how our U3A works.

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

There are over 70 study and interest groups including five that have started in the last 12 months (Current Affairs, Italian Beginners, Italian Improvers, Industrial Heritage 3 and the Memory Course). 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 new updated version of the 'Study & Interest Groups' booklet was published in August and distributed to all members as they renewed or when they joined for the first time. 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.

The Tuesday and Thursday monthly meetings have been well attended with over 200 members on most Tuesdays and between 60 & 100 on Thursdays. Our thanks go to Sue Kettle and Myra Bowyer for arranging such a varied and informative range of speakers. The 24 meetings over the year produced many memorable moments, some that stuck in my mind were a) two lectures describing the tortuous life of Mary Queen of Scots; b) all the members making clay plaques while hearing the history of pottery and then the plaques went on to become 3 large bowls; c) a short history of oriental dance illustrated by 'volunteer' members plucked from the audience and dressed in Arab costumes. 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 sites and museums. There were also two longer trips, one to the south Lake District and another to Tuscany and the Cinque Terre region of Italy. Altogether I make it around 30 activities on the social programme in the last year, plenty to keep us occupied. The Social Team has undergone big changes with Elizabeth Flanagan being joined by Sue Proctor and Jill Heaps in organising the extensive programme.

Throughout the year our U3A was active in local, regional and national U3A events. Some of our members enjoyed participating in an excellent singing day run by the Deeside and Wirral Network in March. The largest event was the NW Region Festival in Chester Cathedral with thought provoking talks and workshops plus addresses from the U3A National Chairman & from Lin Jonas the Chief Executive. Our members also participated in the regional summer school, national science seminar, national summer schools and training workshops for committee members.

Communication is a challenge for a large U3A. The monthly News Sheet and web site www.chesterU3A.org.uk deliver up to date information on all the activities to our membership. Third Age Matters, the national U3A magazine is now delivered direct to all members along with the Sources supplement giving timely information on U3A activities around the country along with interesting and informative articles.

All the 3 strands of activity could not take place as successfully without a well developed infrastructure. There are well over a hundred roles being filled to make our U3A function. Firstly, I must thank those co-ordinators who retired during the year for their efforts in making groups run so well and Sue Clark our retiring Minutes Secretary for making sense of committee meetings over the last 4 years.

Finally, we do recognise the valuable contribution made by so many members in our successful U3A. You know who you are: 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, organise tea/coffee 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 2013