

25 TUNBRIDGE WELLS U3A ANNIVERSARY EDITION



www.tunbridgewellsu3a.org

THE UNIVERSITY OF
THE THIRD AGE

Welcome to our special 25th anniversary edition of our monthly newsletter. We don't normally produce a newsletter in December, but we wanted to provide a lasting record of our history and the events that we have held this year.

Peter Batts has kindly written an article about the formation of our Tunbridge Wells U3A. From our beginning in 1991 we have grown enormously and now have over a thousand members. Our success today is a testament to all the past chairmen, committee members and members who have contributed to us being such a welcoming and thriving group.

This year we had a birthday celebration at our AGM, held a BBQ and disco in the summer and a lunch in place of our October meeting. We had a professional photographer at these three events who took some wonderful photos of our members. I've used some of these photographs to illustrate each event. He took over 70 photos at each event so this is just a selection. I've tried to select images with more than one member in, but there are many lovely individual ones. I have CDs with copies of all the photos and you can also view and download them from these links:

AGM - <http://www.davidhodgkinsonphotography.com/u3aagmjune2016>

BBQ - <http://www.davidhodgkinsonphotography.com/u3abarnsgatebbqjune2016>

Masonic Hall - <http://www.davidhodgkinsonphotography.com/u3amasonichalllunchoct2016>

I do hope you will enjoy looking through this history of our group. I would like to conclude by wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year.

Sue Brimlow
Chairman



Tunbridge Wells U3A - The Start in 1991

It is unbelievable that in November 2016 TW U3A will be 25 years old, almost a generation! To some this will seem like ancient history because there have been so many fundamental changes in that time, including the internet, mobile phones (the half-brick wasn't really mobile), email, satnav and digital cameras. In TW the QVP did not open until 1992.

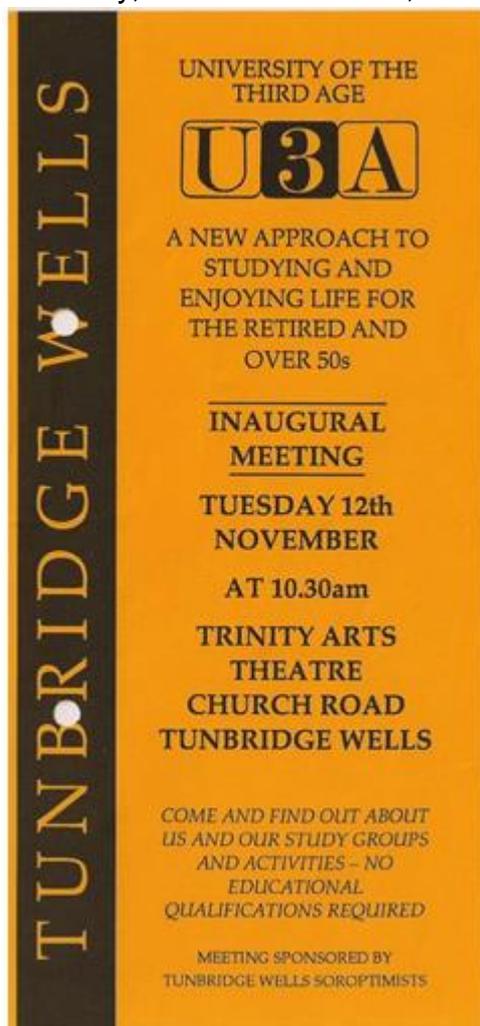
My wife and I first heard about U3A in 1990 at a pre-retirement course, when everyone was strongly recommended to join the new(ish) University of the Third Age. It had been started in France about ten years before and had gained quite a footing in the UK. But when I eventually retired in May 1991, we asked about the Tunbridge Wells U3A and found there wasn't one.

In the excitement of the moment I decided I would start one and I wrote round to a few friends who I thought would help me. We soon got together a steering committee comprising Cecil Beeby, who had been headmaster of Skinners, Margaret Howarth, who had been headmistress of TWGGS, Ruth Wakefield, who knew everything about TW and, I knew, had fairly recently graduated from the Open University, as had Bob Paton, Doreen, my wife, as Secretary and me, as Chairman,

completed the group. It was important that the Committee had knowledge of education to give it credibility; it also needed respectability and, perhaps most important, between us we needed to know a fair number of our potential members.

During that summer we met to discuss how we envisaged a U3A in Tunbridge Wells could be run. We also cleared our relations with the local organisers of Adult Education and the WEA, who all welcomed what we were doing. It was well into the September when we invited Leslie Stacey, one of those behind the earlier and very successful Bromley U3A, to come to one of our meetings. We didn't realise he would put us on the spot. Towards the end of our meeting he announced that he was not leaving until we had fixed a date for our Inaugural Meeting. It was no good pleading that we would leave it until after Christmas, he countered that a meeting before Christmas would get us off to a good start in the New Year. It was just the spur that we needed.

Our various contacts came up trumps. Trinity Theatre, at that time run by Norman and Su Collings, allowed us to hold an inaugural meeting at Trinity; Bob's daughter designed a leaflet, which we placed in all the local Libraries and Adult Education Centres in TW and Tonbridge. We decided to launch Tunbridge



Wells U3A on Tuesday, 12 November 1991; we issued a great many flyers (see above) and from that moment there was no going back. We needed funds to get off the ground and were very fortunate to receive sponsorship from TW Soroptimists, TW Rotary Club and Thomson, Snell & Passmore. We could not start a U3A without groups to offer potential members so committee members offered six sessions on the following : Margaret on Understanding Numbers: Ruth, Poetry: Cecil, Stained Glass and I offered Six Local Church visits. At that stage we did not know if we had a U3A or not.

We invited anyone who had an interest in education in TW to our Inaugural meeting and we made sure the Tunbridge Wells MP (Sir Patrick Mayhew then), knew what we were up to. To make TW Borough Council aware of us and on our side we invited the Mayor, Dennis Smith, to introduce us. It was worthwhile just having him sitting on the platform. We knew that Leslie Stacey was coming to keep us up to the mark, so at the meeting he was asked to tell the meeting a little about Bromley U3A. It was a relief that the meeting at Trinity was well attended, and our plans seemed to be well received. Application Forms had been made available and before the meeting dispersed we already had 41 members. We were in business. I wonder how many of our present membership were at that meeting.

That afternoon I wrote a letter to all members to confirm that we had two groups starting before Christmas and two after. We'd asked Jasper Ridley to speak at our first monthly meeting booked for 14 January in Monson House, at the back of the Town Hall, occupied then by the Council, but now by the Housing Association.

Applications for membership came in very quickly and I reported in Newsletter No1. in December 1991, that our membership was up to 100. This meant that Monson House would be too small and we were luckily able to move the meeting to the Council Chamber. It was even possible to have tea afterwards in the Council Chamber foyer. Jasper Ridley's talk was about the history books he had written, including his biography of Garibaldi, that he had researched in eight languages. It was very interesting and a good start. Our membership increased rapidly and we had to find bigger and bigger halls for our meetings. The list of speakers at those early meetings makes interesting reading, and they certainly made interesting listening. I had no success in trying to persuade other friends and contacts to start a U3A in Tonbridge to take some of the pressure off TW.

I notice that the Newsletter was produced on my Amstrad. Two sides of A4 was the maximum we allowed ourselves for the Newsletter and Wood and Pilcher photocopied it for the growing number of members, so their name appeared across the foot of the second page.

Very early on members had come forward to offer to run study/interest groups and some early members may remember with pleasure; France and the French (Bob Goodall), Whither Russia (Lionel Cole), The Nineteenth Century Novel (Angela Hynes), Schubert and After (Robert Green), Opera on Video (me), Family History (William Neale), and Quilt Art (Joanna Butler). The list of groups grew fairly quickly, but always we wanted more. Some groups were not successful, but were still worth trying (although it was difficult for the organiser to accept that). A series of six

meetings was the norm and although a number of groups went on much longer, care had to be exercised to ensure that no leader was being imposed upon.

In February 1992, we made a half day visit to the Dulwich Art Gallery for £3 a head and a full list of monthly outings followed; there were even one or two evening visits, for instance one evening we went to the College of Arms and on another to a recital at the Wigmore Hall to support a recent TWIYC winner.

Thus the main framework of interest groups, monthly meetings and outings held together by a monthly Newsletter was soon in place. We also tried a series of half-day outings for those without their own transport, but they did not really catch on. When possible we always tried to ensure that more members were able to contribute, the essential element of U3A membership. Some U3A branches organised holidays, but no-one came forward to do that, except for a visit in July 1993 to the European Parliament organised by Bob Goodall and his France and the French group. A number of our members did however enjoy holidays organised by the National U3A Travel group.

Had anyone suggested that TW U3A would only last ten years we would have settled for that, so 25 not-out is a good beginning. So many other organisations in TW and the villages around have ceased to exist in our 25 years that U3A's importance has increased. It must continue to evolve to meet the members' needs and members must continue to play their part. U3A is not just a spectator sport. So here's to the 50th anniversary.

Peter Batts



Peter and Doreen were our guests at the lunch in the Masonic Hall.



June AGM

Following our AGM on June 2nd, the new Mayor of Tunbridge Wells gave a brief talk before cutting a 25th anniversary cake and proposing the toasts, with U3A members joining in with a celebratory glass of fizz each.



MIDSUMMER BBQ



OCTOBER LUNCH



YOUR COMMITTEE AND SOME KEY HELPERS



The AGM with the outgoing Chairman Joy Podbury and Vice Chair Di Brown



Some of the current committee and helpers



Wendy Maher
Secretary



Ruth Johnson
Membership Secretary



Alison Grace
Vice Chairman



David and Jill Scott
Treasurer & Accounts Manager



Jan Summer
Groups Co-ordinator



Adrian Twiner
Business Secretary



Eryll Fabian
Newsletter Editor



Siobhan O'Connell
Website help



Linda Bateup
Tea Rota