

Chairman's Report to the AGM on 16 June 2022

In many ways this has been a trying year for everyone. It started well, as Covid restrictions were beginning to be lifted at the time of the last AGM. Then came the Omicron variant, and restrictions began to feel very tedious. TWu3a has nevertheless had an active programme throughout the year, catering wherever possible both to those who were not yet confident enough to take part in large gatherings and to those who could not wait to get to get back to normal. Indeed, looking back, I am amazed at how much we have achieved.

For those who use Zoom, we provided two speakers each month until December, by which time the demand for the second talk, and for Zoom coffee mornings, had dwindled. Many of us continued to enjoy Caroline Piper's excellent virtual walks and talks until these, too, were discontinued at the end of 2021. We were, however, able to return to the Camden Centre in August for our normal monthly meetings. These were hybrid meetings, enabling members to attend either in person or on Zoom. The AV Team tackled the problems of this new technology with enthusiasm, and we shall continue to offer hybrid monthly meetings in the future to enable those members who cannot attend the Camden Centre to take part.

Setting up hybrid meetings was not without its challenges as, indeed, was the problem of premises. The roof of the Camden Centre Hall sprang a leak in heavy rain on the night before our second meeting and, once repaired, the Hall was taken over by the NHS as a vaccination centre. The Tunbridge Wells Christian Fellowship kindly allowed us to use their spacious Hall until we could return to the Camden Centre, for which we are very grateful. Many members would have liked to move there permanently but this proved impractical, though we are hoping to use the TWCF hall for one-off meetings in the future.

A highlight of the year has been the celebration of our 30th Anniversary. The inaugural meeting took place on 12th November 1991 and it would have been sad, indeed, if Covid had stopped us from celebrating. As it was, over 60 of us gathered for a magnificent tea at the Masonic Hall with stirring entertainment by the Rock Choir. The event was attended by the Mayor and was very much enjoyed by all.

In December, we produced a special anniversary edition of the Newsletter including articles by many of our earliest members and snippets from past editions which shows how much TWu3a has grown – and how some problems never change! As well as information about both past and forthcoming TWu3a activities, the Newsletters have included the thought-provoking quizzes by Colin and Jenny Brennan and the crossword sent to us each month by the Eastbourne Meads u3a Crossword Group. These will be phased out now, but we are most grateful to them for providing these excellent brain teasers during the pandemic.

A glance through the last 12 months' Newsletters, shows TWu3a in full swing as we return to a more normal way of life. After so many long months of lockdown followed by further restrictions, there has been an enormous enthusiasm for getting out and about. Monthly outings have continued with great success, and we have been able to reinstate trips that were cancelled due to the pandemic (Thursford Christmas Spectacular, trip to Devon), and arrange new ones (Potters, Birmingham Military Tattoo). The Events Team has put together a varied programme -- from bingo and line-dancing to another slap-up tea and much more -- which is proving very popular. Above all, our groups are returning to normal giving members an opportunity to socialise while pursuing their special interests. A few groups, sadly, did not survive the pandemic but new ones have been formed and more are on the way.

Membership has continued to rise, and we hope soon to be back to the pre-pandemic level. In 2020/21 we were only able to host a New Members' Meeting on Zoom, so we were delighted this year to have face-to-face meetings in September and April as well as one on Zoom in February. They were well attended and several new members have started groups and volunteered in other capacities.

During the year we have made our website much more attractive with slide shows and more photographs. We now also have two Facebook pages, one for members only on which members can post any matter of interest, both u3a and non-u3a, and an open one for the public with information of upcoming events in TWu3a. The use of all three is gradually increasing and they are an aid to recruitment, as well as useful tools for members.

Membership was also encouraged when we were invited by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to take part in the picnic which they arranged in Calverley Gardens in September to thank volunteers from many different charities who had continued to provide services during the pandemic. We housed a display in a gazebo where the Mayor and Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Kent as well as members of the public showed great interest in TWu3a. This was a useful way of raising awareness of u3a and of recruiting members to TWu3a and, following its success, we shall be mounting similar displays at the Queen's Jubilee Celebrations organised by the Borough Council on 3rd June, and at future public events.

As I predicted in my report to last year's AGM, TWu3a continues to grow from strength to strength and I should like to take this opportunity to thank the Committee who have worked tirelessly throughout the year to produce all this activity. David Brimlow and Joan Young have kindly offered to stand for a further period of three years. Sandra McDonald has agreed to stand as Vice Chairman and Philippa Bernstein, who joined the Committee in the middle of the year, has agreed to stand as Events Co-ordinator – I am grateful to them all, as well as to the other members who remain in post. In addition, I should like to thank Adrian Twiner, who stood down earlier this year, for all that he has done for TWu3a over many years both on and off the Committee. Many thanks, too, to Marilyn Smart who has headed the Events Team for the last 10 years – I cannot remember a single Event that has not been a resounding success! Without members who volunteer, TWu3a would not exist, so – in alphabetical order – we all owe enormous thanks to the AV Team, the Events Team, all the Group Organisers, the Meeters and Greeters, the Talks Organiser, the Tea Ladies, the Webmaster and her Assistant, and to all of you who step up when the need arises and live up to our motto of

By the Members, For the Members.

The future of TWu3a looks good and with your help we shall make it even better.

Eryll Fabian