

Chairs Report 2023-2024

I can't believe I have now been Chair for a year, it has flown by.

Firstly I must thank all the committee members who have worked so hard to make our meetings successful whether it's our secretary Rhiannon who keeps us organised and up to date, Karen who arranges the speakers, Hilary who supports the Group Leaders, Lynda our Vice Chair, Phil Dew who provides and sets up the sound and screen equipment, Rae who looks after the membership, Kathleen who looks after the finances, Kay who keeps the press informed, June and Grahame with others making the tea and coffee, and all the others in the background who work to keep our u3a group going.

As I write, we now have 96 members, close to our pre Covid membership. We have also started another group for Bird Watching thanks to Chris Hattersley, which takes us to nine groups.

A huge thanks must go to David Hall for all the work he put into creating our website and keeping it up to date for almost seven years. Owen Parry has now taken on the webmaster role with a revamped website and has also trained some of the Group Leaders so they can update their events on the website. This helps share the workload of the webmaster.

Our Christmas meeting was very successful with a large turn out and we all enjoyed the mulled wine and minced pies. With music and songs led by Phil and Linda Somme Dew, challenging quizzes by Kay Blackwell and decorations by Crafts4all we had a very merry time. The Creative Writing group then performed one of their stories, '*The Trial of Father Christmas*' sadly he was found guilty!

We have had a wide range of speakers in this last year from the Newport Medieval Ship, Caving, Local History, and the Music of Noel Coward to Hereford Cathedral. We have speakers booked for the next season to April 2025. A huge thanks to our Speaker Secretary Karen Harris.

The Art Group has been very successful and the number of members has increased this past year. The Walking Group continues well with two short walks and one long walk each month, but the recent wet weather has forced some cancellations. The long walks have included; Tor Y Foel, Sugar Loaf, the Hatteral Ridge and a Daffodil Walk near Ross on Wye.

The Family & Social History Group has been continuing work on two main projects, The Living Stones at St Elli Church & Oral Histories. Living Stones is an ambitious project and is focussed on photographing and researching the headstones and memorials in the churchyard. They have completed some 362 graves but there are around 1,000 in the five plots around the church. Their work has been aided by the Churchyard Chums group who have worked tirelessly to remove the growth and vegetation around and covering some of the graves. Oral Histories are where we are asking local long-term residents to talk to us about their memories of growing up in the area. The information gathered and collated will be of social historical interest and will provide an insight into how our local community was in the past.

The Crafts4all Group do a number of crafts with some sessions for individual work and others for group projects with everyone sharing their skills. Many of the group are also in a Knitter Natter Group which is outside the u3a umbrella and they made a wide variety of items for sale with all the proceeds going to Abergavenny Food Bank.

The Bird Watching Group is small but friendly and is for members interested in birdwatching and nature in general. It was started in December of last year and has had one official meeting since. The winter has stopped meeting as a group but they are gearing up to have one formal meeting every month throughout the summer and autumn of 2024.

The Garden Group now has a list of visits for the coming year, including Hereford Cathedral garden. In the past year they visited Sir Roy Strong's garden 'Lasketts', High Glanau Manor, Kentchurch and Hergest Croft.

The Creative Writing group have moved beyond just writing short stories to also reading them to residents of Penpergwm House which has been very well received, it seems the residents want more crime stories! The Bridge Group continues and is always looking for more members to make up four's for their games. Last but not least is the Table Tennis group who has also held a session for younger residents along with some training and coaching, a very successful session.

If any member wants to join one of the groups all details and contacts are on the web site and all members are welcomed at our monthly talks. Finally I want to thank all members for their continued involvement in our interest groups and monthly talks and a special thanks to group leaders. u3a is built around shared, informal learning, fun and activity and plays an important part in helping us to live longer and better. The Committee needs new members to ensure Gilwern u3a continues as current members need to stand down after five years so please consider joining the committee.

Finally, The Third Age Trust which is the Organisation behind u3a nationally has been consulting the membership on proposed changes to its governance structure ("Fit for the Future"). It is seeking to overcome, first a problem with a perception that the Trust was distant from u3as and second, the attrition at Board level because of the onerous demands on its members (non-paid volunteers) who faced what is effectively a full-time occupation. It is proposed to have a smaller Board which would deal only with legal & financial compliance, still drawn from the membership. but from those possessing skills & experience in governance & finance. There would also be a u3a Council of elected regional & network members to discuss the u3a movement strategy & initiatives. More detail is available on the South Wales Network website: (u3asites.org.uk/walesu3a) - a site which also has useful information & links about Wales & national u3a events.

Best Wishes to you all

David Harris, Chair Gilwern U3A.