

Chairs Report 2025-2026

I have now come to the end of my term as Chair so we will be appointing a new Member as Chair at the AGM in April.

Firstly, I must thank all the Committee members who have worked so hard to make our meetings successful whether it's our Secretary Linda who keeps us organised and up to date, Karen who arranges the speakers, Hilary Lipscombe who supported our Group Leaders, until her untimely passing earlier this year. Rhiannon who has looked after the membership, Kathleen who looks after the finances, and Grahame our Vice Chair and who invariably makes the Hall ready for our Talks and, with others, makes sure we are supplied with refreshments thereafter. The Talks would not run as smoothly as they do without Phil Dew who provides and sets up the sound and screen equipment. Thanks also to Kay Blackwell who keeps the press informed and also to all the others in the background who work to keep our u3a groups going.

Jackie Peacock has now joined the Committee after a year observing our meetings. She has already come up with some ideas to promote Gilwern u3a this year with a fresh style on our News Letters so looking forward to the next year.

As I write, we now have 115 members and hope you have all enjoyed the Talks and group activities we have arranged this past year. We are always keen to hear about possible new subjects that could become groups so do come forward with your ideas.

Huge thanks must go to Owen Parry who took 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. He has also created new tools to allow additional information to be added for some of the Groups, notably the Family History site. Owen also stepped in to take on the role of Site Administrator for Beacon (the Third Age Trust website designed to manage membership and finances). His technical abilities are making the running of Gilwern u3a so much easier for the Committee.

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 Lynda Dew, a challenging quiz by Kay Blackwell and members of the Creative Writing Group and decorations by Crafts4all we had a very merry time.

Again, we have had a wide range of speakers in this last year from Great Houses of Crickhowell, Uniforms to Underwear, Hans Holbein - Henry VIII's Spin Doctor and the amazing voice of Chris Purkiss singing songs of Broadway. We have speakers booked for the next season to April 2027. Huge thanks to our Talks Secretary, Karen Harris

The Art Group has been very successful and the number of members has increased this past year. They held a successful sale of Paintings at the end of November jointly with the Crafts4all group. The Walking Group continues well with two short walks and one long walk each month, even though the sun doesn't always smile on us. The long walks included, Tor Y Foel, Monmouth up to the Kymin, Grwyne Fawr and Dam, Grwyne Fawr around to Partrishow, Cyfartha Park at Merthyr.

The Social & Family 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 focused on photographing and researching the headstones and memorials in Llanelly Churchyard. They have completed over 300 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. WW1 Remembers and Oral Histories are available on the Gilwern u3a web site as are many of the Living Stones research.

The Crafts4all Group members 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 Knit & Natter Group at Gilwern Roots Tuesday morning Café sessions which is outside the u3a umbrella and where they have 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 2023 and has met and visited several local sites and a few a little more distant – Newport Wetlands, Beaufort Ponds and Garn Lake.

The Garden Group had some great visits last year including; Leaf Creative Garden Centre and Weston Hall Gardens near Ross, Hillcrest at Blackwood and Veddw House Gardens. Devauden, and Keepers Pond. Visits for 2026/27 have been arranged and will be added to the web site shortly.

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 and going well. It seems the residents want more crime stories! The Bridge Group continues and is always looking for more members to make up fours for their games. The Table Tennis group is going so well, they are currently closed to new members. They held a session for younger residents, along with some training and coaching, all very successful.

We now have a Group for Photography thanks to Tony Parton Frost and Stephen Walmsley. They meet on the third Thursday each month and share 5 photos from each member of the subject chosen, the latest being wild life. They also share skills and knowledge to help others get better photos. A recent trip to Bryn Bach Park was a good site for taking photos.

A Book Club has now been going for a while and meet on the last Monday of the Month at either the Bowls Club or the Garden Centre café in Llanfoist and so far has been working very well led by Terri McAvoy. Contact details to join and to confirm the venue are on the web site.

If you are interested in any of these groups do get in touch with the Group Leader of any particular group or with the Group Co-ordinator on the web site.

The Group Coordinator Role is to support and keep in touch with all the Groups and to help set up new groups. It's very useful to have an oversight of how the groups are getting on, and, in this regard, Jackie Peacock has kindly volunteered to take over this role previously held by Hilary Lipscombe.

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. To ensure we are able to continue to provide these, the Committee needs new members so that Gilwern u3a is able to continue, not only because many current Committee members will be required to stand down next year but also because all Committees benefit from the new ideas new members bring with them. Please consider joining the Committee if you want Gilwern u3a to continue.

Best Wishes to you all

David Harris, Chair Gilwern u3a.