

u3a
Swindon

learn, laugh, live

Newsletter



The Ridgeway
Photograph by
Stella Allen

August 2021

Hello from the Chair

I do hope you are all enjoying your summer whether it be at home in your garden, a 'staycation' in beautiful Britain, or risking that holiday abroad that you have been waiting so long for. The spring and early summer weather have created a lot of weeds so even those staying at home have a lot to get on with – alongside football, Wimbledon, Flower Shows and the opening up of entertainment venues.

The Committee and other volunteers helping us with our work have had a lot to do in anticipating the restarting of our activity and interest groups. We have been finalising our options for resolving the financial issues, details of which have been sent out separately. We have also put into place a new on-line renewal system and are working to ensure our policies and procedures, particularly those concerning health and safety and risk assessments, are up to date and ready for a new and safe academic year.

We know from your communications that many of you are preparing to restart your groups in September and the Committee will do all we can to support you to do so. You can renew from now on for your September 2021 to September 2022 membership. We would ask you to renew online if at all possible as this saves us the costs associated with cheques. Renewal via our web-site should be straightforward for almost everyone. We are aware that our decisions regarding the new subscription model have upset a number of members, particularly of course, those in high cost groups. However, we also know that the majority of our groups are low or no cost and therefore relatively unaffected by all these financial issues. For those in high cost groups that are most affected by our decisions, we continue to do all we can to help reduce cost by trying to find cheaper venues, reducing the number of groups or maximising number of people in each group. Our new 'hybrid' subscription model continues to give some subsidy of up to £600 which we think is a fair compromise. We hope that at the end of this exercise in cost-cutting the majority of our members will be renewing and looking forward to meeting their friends and continuing their particular interest or activity. As we go forward into the 'new normal' post pandemic world I am confident the Swindon u3a will survive and prosper.

In June the Committee held an Away Day to start to develop our Strategic Plan for the coming year. It was the first occasion that the whole team had ever met together in person – 6 members of the

Committee have joined in the last few months and have only met via Zoom. As most of us know, Zoom has been a tremendous boon during the pandemic but it can never replace interpersonal, face to face communication. Nevertheless, for those members who, for various reasons, are unable to attend regular u3a meetings we are actively exploring the possibility of developing 'Hybrid' meetings where those who can meet in person and those who can't are able to join in via Zoom or video conferencing. It may all sound terribly technical at the moment but just remember that there was a time when we all thought mobile phones were a step too far!

The Committee has recently recruited another new member, Jill Kelly, who has joined us as our new Membership Liaison Secretary. Her role is to strengthen our support for members not only when they first join but throughout their membership. Jill will be working with other members across the Committee such as the Office Manager, the Publicity Officer, the Groups Coordinator and the Events Team to ensure that members get any queries and problems dealt with as smoothly as possible and that we promote positive events for all our members. I am sorry that we cannot please all the members all the time but we are going to do our best to return quickly to our mission to help you Learn, Laugh and Live.

We have some vacancies and would love it if any of you could come forward to help us. At present we have a vacancy for a Data Protection Officer and for someone to join the Events Team. Do contact me if you think you could help. Neither is a very onerous task. It is worth pointing out that all members of the Committee and voluntary teams are just like you. We are u3a members, many of us are also Group Organisers and we have volunteered to help out with the tasks that need to be done to keep the organisation running smoothly. This is a membership organisation run by the members for the members.

We will have a stall at most of the local fetes and events this summer but due to unusual circumstances this year we have decided to postpone our September Open Day until October 23rd. By then we hope all groups will have resumed and Group Organisers will be able to talk with potential new recruits about what is on offer. I'm sure it will once again be a wonderful, celebratory event of our fantastic organisation. I look forward to meeting you there if not before.

Best wishes

Gill Brain (Chair)

Easy Art Group

Liden Community Centre every Monday afternoon

The Easy Art group was formed from the waiting list of the Painting for Fun group, and welcomes members of any standard, even complete beginners, to paint or draw using any medium.

Following an earlier visit to the Liden centre to confirm seating, hygiene, access and other Covid related issues, it was decided that the group could restart in a very safe and secure way as soon as regulations allowed. Most importantly for the group we were able to space desks at least 3m apart, so apart from when walking around we were able to sit and paint without having to wear masks!

The group duly restarted on the first day of the relaxation of the rules on 17th May following the extended lockdown. Of the 15 members in the group at the start of 2020, 3 decided to hold off attending until all restrictions were removed which enabled us to form two sub groups to meet under the 'Rule of 6'.



As Group organiser I send out reminder emails to members asking them to confirm attendance each week. Any free spaces are quickly filled from the other sub group.

Although the room layout works very well with everyone being able to see and talk to others in the group, it is not the same as before Covid. The usual break for coffee is missed and less moving around means less interaction and encouragement within the group.

We are all looking forward to being able to meet as a whole group once again, and putting the last dreadful year behind us.

I would encourage all GOs to restart their groups as soon as possible, complying with government guidance to keep members safe and secure, so we can all start to get back to some sort of normality.

[Dave Todd](#)

[Click on the name above to make contact](#)

Data Protection

Keeping our personal information, such as our contact details, safe from those who want to bombard us with advertising or use it for something more sinister is important to all of us. Swindon u3a has policies and procedures in place to keep our data safe but we need someone to keep an eye on things and ensure that our data is as safe as it can be. Have you had some experience of data protection or maybe you'd like to add another string to your bow? If so, you could be our new Data Protection Officer. Training and support will be available. For more information or an informal chat, contact [Sue Carvey](#) by clicking on her name.



Copy Dates

Items for the September Newsletter must be received by

8th August 2021

Items for the October Newsletter must be received by

5th September 2021

‘What’s On’ has been suspended for the time being.

All contributions must be sent to the Editor using the Newsletter contributions e-mail address newsletter@swindonu3a.org.uk

Geoff Bryan

Royal Wootton Bassett Activities

In this most challenging of times for the u3a, I just wanted to share with you some positive news. Also to give encouragement to members who are unsure about renewing their membership.

I am a Group Organiser for u3a Activities in Royal Wootton Bassett. One of the activities I run is the Scrabble Group.

This group was meeting at The Cross Keys in RWB once a month. This was a small friendly group and we were able to meet in the function room. Then, we all know what happened, the pandemic struck - no more meetings.

Fast forward to the present. Hopefully, as we are near to ending Covid restrictions, I decided to find out if The Cross Keys would have us back. As there was some doubt I set out to find another venue within RWB to host this group. I was successful in this task. My members will have an activity to go back to in September at The United Reform Church in RWB.

Also in September my Quiz Group will be restarting, fortunately at the same venue, Hook Village Hall.

All Group Organisers are doing their best to enable their members to go back to their groups. There is a lot of work being done behind the scenes in order for this to happen. We would appreciate your support, otherwise there won't be a group to go back to.

We are all craving for the return of social interaction and taking part again in the activities that we have an interest in.

I am hoping this will encourage you to renew membership, so that we can continue to help ourselves and help others to Learn, Laugh, Live.



(Continued Below)

Proposed New Discussion Group

Just before lockdown I was looking at starting a new discussion group, mainly for men, but open to all, located in the Royal Wootton Bassett area. Venue yet to be decided. I would like to have at least 10 members to start off with. Possibly meeting on a Monday or a Tuesday, once a month between 10.30am till Midday. I am sure there will be lots to talk about!! If interested, please contact me.

[John Turner](#)

Contact John by clicking on his name above

Proposed New Group – Archaeology

In the forthcoming u3a year, I hope to set up another Archaeological group in Swindon.

To this end, we would need a hall with Wi-Fi. There are a few in Swindon but to estimate the size we would need, could you please email me simply stating the word Archaeology to register your interest in such a group The size of the hall depends on the number willing to attend therefore I need to know how big a hall to hire. Then, I will be able to email all of you to give you information on the first meeting. Initially the group would meet once a month with the first meeting, hopefully, in September. Day and venue yet to be decided.

[Doreen Jackson](#)

***Contact Doreen by
clicking on her name
above***



u3a at Wroughton Carnival

On 3rd July we had our u3a stand at the Wroughton Carnival. Although the timing of the Carnival had been cut down, being limited to the afternoon only, it was still a happy, busy little occasion. The stalls were interesting, the fairground was buzzing with children and the ice cream vans had queues for their 99s. Swindon 105.5 radio was present with music and chat and later in the afternoon a local choir and a pop band kept everything going with a swing. Although a little blustery, the sun shone and even the few grey clouds that appeared in the sky, scuttled by and dropped their rain somewhere else!

We had a good deal of interest in our stand which was visited by some existing members and a goodly number of potential members. As one approaching lady came up to our stand I asked “have you heard of the u3a?” She replied, “Oh, yes. I’m already a member. *The best thing I ever did*”. How I wished I could bottle that message.

Here are Sue and Bob Carvey holding our leaflets and looking encouraging.

Gill



Brain

Facebook – just launched!

Swindon u3a now has a Facebook page. Many of you will have become familiar with Facebook over the last year. It’s a great way to keep in touch. We’ve just started so hope you will join us there to share information about what’s on. Click here to go direct

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/875550859722531/>

Slow Ways – walkers, your country needs you

Many of our members love walking and since the first lockdown even more of us have taken to the freedom of using our two feet to visit and explore places. Often some of these new discoveries have been tracks, trails and lanes nearby that we didn't know existed. Isn't it strange that we often know more about far away places that we visit infrequently than we do about the walking track or park that is just around the corner?

When the first lockdown occurred in March 2020, a geographer and walker, Dan Raven-Ellison, had the idea of creating a hiking network across the UK, connecting areas within towns and from town to town – a vast inter-relationship of walks. The idea has grown and there is now an army of people helping to map the network as people join in, mapping walks in their area and helping to join up the dots. There are now over 7000 Slow Ways and 100,000 kms of walks criss-crossing the country

linking up hamlets, villages, towns and cities. All of these are mapped by volunteers. You don't need to walk far to get involved. Currently there is an army of over 500 volunteers creating the most comprehensive network of walking routes in Britain. To volunteer you will need a computer and must be comfortable reading OS maps. If you are interested why not sign up at ravenellison.com ?



Gill Brain

Quote, Unquote

We all want quiet. We all want beauty....We all need space. Unless we have it, we cannot reach that sense of quiet in which whispers of better things come to us gently.

Octavia Hill 1883

Co-founder of The National Trust

Lesley Basu

What's missing?

As Swindon u3a seeks to re-group after the devastating impact of the pandemic, I have become aware of just how many different groups and activities have been offered in the past and will hopefully be able to resume in the coming year. From Archery and Art to Quizzing and Ukulele there is an almost bewildering choice.

It seems that many Swindon members are keen to stay physically active; I counted 14 Pétanque groups, 7 each for Walking and Table Tennis, 6 Short Mat Bowls groups as well as various types of Dancing, Yoga and Tai Chi. Arts and Crafts groups also seem to be well represented as do languages.

However, as we look towards the Open Day and a new start, might it be worth asking if there are some areas where the offerings are limited at the moment but which would appeal to enough members to make new groups and activities viable?

A quick look at other u3a organisations suggests that 'Food and Drink' is a popular category elsewhere but with very little on offer in our current provision. As a relatively new member I do not know what has perhaps been tried before; can anyone out there tell me? Is there an appetite(!) for a monthly pub lunch gathering? Any would-be food critics out there who would enjoy taking a turn at a review of establishments visited for the newsletter ?

Wine, cheese and other food tastings feature in some programmes. Are there foodies out there who would enjoy sharing their knowledge and enthusiasm?

On a more basic level, are there people who find themselves wanting or needing to cook for themselves at a later stage in life but needing some advice and confidence building with their home cookery skills? Perhaps a shared cook and lunch session might be welcomed?

Whilst there are several different types of music group listed, is there an audience for an even broader range? We have singers, guitar and ukulele players, bell ringers and woodwind players. Are there brass and strings players just waiting for an opportunity?

It would be interesting to know where members feel they would welcome new groups and of what kind so we can explore if they are feasible. I would be happy to co-ordinate and share responses.

Contact [Jill Kelly](#) by clicking on her name

Line Dance Groups

The Wednesday and Thursday groups started on 19th May. In line with government guidelines numbers attending were restricted. The venue was measured to give us a floor plan to see how many people could be accommodated allowing for the two metre social distancing required. A floor plan was drawn up (courtesy of Alex Cranswick) which showed that 30 people would be permitted - 29 plus myself.

Both classes were filled quickly which shows how keen people were to start getting back to some sort of 'normal'. Masks were worn when entering the building, hand sanitisers were placed around the hall, and chairs were put out socially distanced.

Everyone who came was really pleased that the classes had started again and so pleased to be physically and mentally active again. Eight weeks on, and it seems like we've never been away - it is still the same friendly, happy group it always was but with just a few less bodies. It took a few weeks to get the memory and legs back in gear but we're getting there.

I didn't feel able to restart the Friday beginner group. It is such a popular group that to try and reduce it to 29 people would mean many people being upset if they weren't included in the 29! I felt it better to wait until all restrictions were lifted before thinking about restarting.

The announcement that 19th July is 'freedom' day means that those waiting to come dancing again will be able to do so and I will email members of the groups to invite them back. I am aware of only one objection to my decision to start the classes again, but out of all the people who support these classes to have just one objection confirms to me that it was right to start again.

I am aiming to restart the Friday group on 6th August. I have had quite a few enquiries about when this would happen so hopefully all pre-lockdown members will return.



*Sheila
Turland*

List of Email Addresses

Chair	chairman@swindonu3a.org.uk
All members of committee	committee@swindonu3a.org.uk
Accommodation	accommodation@swindonu3a.org.uk
Data Protection	secretary@swindonu3a.org.uk
Electronic news distribution	enews@swindonu3a.org.uk
General enquiries	office@swindonu3a.org.uk
Groups' co-ordinator	group.coord@swindonu3a.org.uk
Health & Safety	healthandsafety@swindonu3a.org.uk
Membership Liaison Secretary	membership@swindonu3a.org.uk
Newsletter contributions	newsletter@swindonu3a.org.uk
Office manager	office.manager@swindonu3a.org.uk
Office administration	office@swindonu3a.org.uk
Secretary	secretary@swindonu3a.org.uk
Speaker organisers (Monthly Meetings)	speaker.organiser@swindonu3a.org.uk
Treasurer	treasurer@swindonu3a.org.uk
Treasury Team for Accommodation	treasuryteam@swindonu3a.org.uk
Banking	
Visits	
Webmaster	webmaster@swindonu3a.org.uk

**N.B The office will re-open to members on
2nd August 2021**

The office is open Monday, Wednesday and Friday from
10:00 to 12:00

The Editor reserves the right to amend or abbreviate any entries submitted.

We should also like to point out that any views expressed are not necessarily those of the organisation or of the Editor.