

Newsletter



Rushey Platt Bridge
Watercolour by Anthea Hilson

November 2021

Important Information

Please Read

Swindon u3a AGM

All Change!

On Friday 22nd October the rate of Covid 19 infections in Swindon stood at 949 per 100,000, an increase of 280 from the previous week. This rapid rise in the number of cases in Swindon is of great concern to many. Although most of us are double jabbed and an increasing number triple jabbed, Covid 19 is not something we can ignore. Admittedly there are fewer deaths and hospitalisations due to Covid 19 than at the height of the pandemic, but a dose of covid can still be debilitating, especially to people in the older age group.

The current Swindon u3a constitution does not permit our AGMs to be held electronically. The temporary legislation which allowed February's AGM to be held on line ran out in March 2021. Luckily for us, the Charity Commission (whose regulations must be obeyed) updated their advice on October 21st 2021 and, if there is sufficient reason, Trustees can decide to hold annual general meetings on line. The Management Committee (trustees) took notice of this change and, due to the rate of Covid 19 infections in Swindon and bearing in mind the vulnerability of some of our members, made the decision to cancel the in person AGM planned for 8th November.

Swindon u3a's AGM will now be held by Zoom on Monday 6th December starting at 2.15. All members will receive further details of how to register for the meeting and "attend" in the coming days. I'm sorry we won't be able to provide biscuits over the airwaves but hopefully the change will allow many more of you to feel that it is safe to participate in Swindon u3a's AGM. Remember we still need at least 100 attendees!

Sue Carvey, General Secretary

'Hello' from the Chair

So summer is now officially over and in spite of a touch of lovely 'Indian Summer' in September, we have now moved fairly and squarely into Autumn and the start of our new u3a year. It has been wonderful to see so many of you renewing your membership, to have so many groups restarting and to welcome so many new members. The last count as I write this in early October is 81 new members. We welcome you to your new u3a adventure and hope you learn, laugh and live happily with us. Can I remind members who have not yet renewed that the deadline for this year's renewals is as usual October 31st. After that, if you haven't renewed you will be taken off our system. But also remember that you can re-join at any time in the future – we hope you will.

Of course, restarting after over a year of Covid lockdowns and restrictions has not been without its problems. Our renewal system has not always been straightforward and the volunteer staff in the Office have done a magnificent job in handling a complex process. The new system of supplements has caused some administrative teething problems but hopefully these are now being gradually resolved. There have also been the additional Covid-driven risk assessments and changes to traditional venues – all adding to the strains of restarting. Thank you everyone for being patient and understanding as our systems gear up to full operation once again.

Your Committee have been working extra hard to support groups and members at this time. But it is also important for us to look ahead to the future as well as dealing with current issues. We are undertaking a fundamental review of how we should go forward into the mid-2020s in a stronger and more sustainable way. To do this we are taking a number of actions.

Firstly, we have invited members to join **Focus Groups** to obtain feedback on their experiences of and ideas about Swindon u3a. Over 60 members have come forward to join such groups and we hope to have completed this research over the next couple of months.

Secondly, we have been doing some **networking research** with other similar u3as across the country to see how they operate and what works for them and the issues they are dealing with. So far, we have talked with 6 of the 10 largest u3as (Swindon being the 10th in this category) from Edinburgh to Sheffield, Peterborough to East Suffolk and Fleet. In addition to looking at the top 10 we have talked with a few more local

u3as such as Gloucester and Cirencester. So far, this networking has revealed some extremely interesting ideas. We are not in copying mode here but in feeding the best ideas from anywhere into our thinking about the future for our own u3a.

Thirdly, we have begun to set aside more time in our Committee meetings to discuss, brainstorm and debate important **longer term, strategic issues** in addition to dealing with the pressing current ones. We don't always agree but we are all committed to looking ahead and trying to keep the best of what we have while being prepared for a different future ahead. Our findings from Focus Groups and Networking will feed into our conclusions. All these strands should come together in the next few months in a new strategy for Swindon u3a.

I try to achieve all the above. I am totally committed to keeping you informed and involved. We are a member-led organisation and although I don't want to keep bombarding you with lots of information and detail, there will be information for you to read and get involved with over the coming months. I am aware that most of you just want to get on with enjoying your activities but please get involved. We cannot end up with a representative outcome if we only get feedback from the 'active' minority. We want to hear your views.

We had our important **Open Day on the 23rd October** at St Joseph's College – our shop window to the Swindon u3a world. It was well attended and I would like to say a big thank you to all who came and to all those willing volunteers who made it such a success.

May I also remind you of other activities which we hope you will get involved with in the next few weeks. Firstly, our AGM is on the 6th December by Zoom and we hope to see as many of you as possible. I would love to say a personal 'Hello'. Finally, there is our **Christmas Party on 17th Dec.** at the Ellendune Centre. We have a great line up of fun and activities from some of our members. Do put the date in your diary – we really need some fun and laughter in our lives this year!

And so, I hope as we go towards the year end that Swindon u3a will once more be providing you with that wonderful combination of Learn, Laugh and Live.

Gill Brain

Help with u3a Tasks

We have a number of job vacancies and tasks which for which we need extra help. These are:

Groups Coordinator: The Groups Co-ordinator's role is that of providing support and guidance to the Group Organisers. This is a Trustee Role and the person or persons would sit on the Management Committee and act as an important point of contact and information between the Committee and our interest and activity Groups.

Events Team Members: We need two people to join our Events team and help with ideas for, and organisation of, our u3a social events such as monthly Speaker Meetings and other cross u3a gatherings. Now that we are getting back into the swing of a more normal post-Covid life we would like to begin to plan a timetable of interesting social events for our members. Come and help us.

IT Assistant/s: We are keen to review and strengthen our current systems and provide more IT support for our members who are less familiar with everyday, modern IT whether it be using emails, accessing Sucas, or using zoom to join meetings remotely.

DPO: We need someone to keep an eye on data protection legislation and support and advise our groups as and when necessary. This is a consultative not a Committee role.

If you think you could help please contact [Gill Brain \(Chair\)](#) or [Linda Young \(Vice Chair\)](#) by clicking on one of the names.

Rushey Platt Bridge

David Hewitt's photograph of the Rushey Platt bridge on the front page of the October issue of the Newsletter prompted Anthea Hilson to send me a photograph of her painting of the bridge, which I have put on the front page of this issue. Anthea is a member of both the Painting and Pastels groups on Thursdays at Savernake St Community Hall. By coincidence, I have recently been reading my copy of "A M&SWJR Album and found a photograph of the same bridge taken in 1881, when it was new.

Geoff Bryan

Poetry Appreciation

“Take heart with the day and begin again” (Susan Coolidge from ‘New Every Morning’)

The Poetry Appreciation Group is about to restart. Would you like to join us? Do you enjoy reading poems? Can you remember any poems from your childhood? How about loving words and rhythm? Poems are even better when read out loud and discussed in a lively group. The Poetry Appreciation Group takes a flexible approach to poems, choosing themes, classical and contemporary, ancient and modern, sad or funny, formal or stylistic. There are opportunities too to read any poems you may have written. You don't need to know a lot about poetry – just join us, read them, learn more about them and enjoy them. Get in touch to find out more.

[Gill Brain](#)

Please click on the name to make contact.

Monica's Tea Squad

Thanks to those of you who have already volunteered. Monica would appreciate a few more helping hands though please. The larger the squad the easier it will be to provide refreshments for u3a events as we appreciate that not everyone may be available for each event.

Please contact [Monica](#) by clicking on her name if you are able to help.



History of the u3a

How much do you know about the history of the u3a? Many of us have belonged for years without knowing how it developed. And yet it is a fascinating story. It all started in the UK with three 'Founding Fathers', great intellectual giants of their day: Michael Young, Eric Midwinter and Peter Laslett. They were already friends and had illustrious records of innovations, research and publications – the National Extension College, the Open University, the Consumers Association, philosophical and sociological research and writing plus a deep commitment to education in its broadest sense of lifelong learning. They were all agreed that British education was failing far too many people, was too pedagogic and too fond of rearranging the educational deckchairs on the Titanic to little avail. At some point in their many discussions they came to the conclusion that older people also had a right to education and would, by virtue of their experience and knowledge be able to benefit from a very different and non-traditional type of education. And so began the u3a idea.

They started by establishing some guiding principles:

The 'Third Age' would not be defined by any specific age parameters. It was simply the age that followed on from the 'First Age' of socialisation and the 'Second Age' of job and family responsibilities. No one was to be barred from u3a because they were too young or old.

The new u3a would be a 'Self-Help' organisation – a body of people who want to learn and help others to learn through self-directed learning. No qualifications were to be required, nor any real distinction between teacher and learner – people would come together, united by a common interest and work together to learn from and to teach each other.

The joining fee should be kept at a minimum so as not to keep out any who want to join with no support other than fund-raising when necessary.

The curriculum would be as broad as human and financial resources allowed – learning for learning's sake – as an end in itself.

1982 was the launch date and the gestation period was by no means smooth or straightforward. By 1984 there were 15 u3as (and a few who tried but failed). Many early u3as helped other embryo groups to get

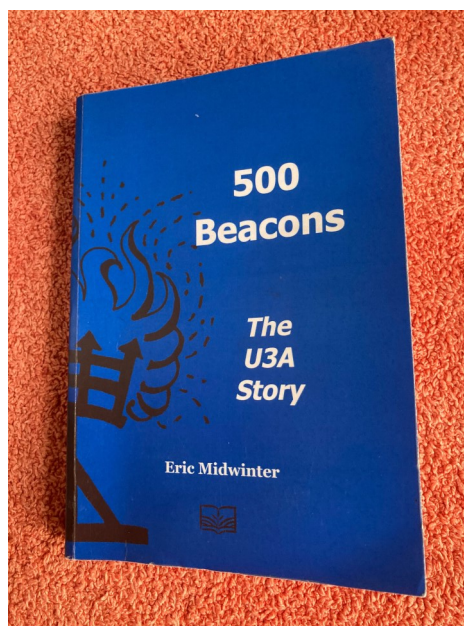


going. The National Office started as a small group of the three or four main drivers of the movement who met in a spare room in Wimbledon but in 1983 it assumed the title of the Third Age Trust and was registered as a Charity. By 1990 there were about a hundred u3as, no two exactly alike, each adapting to its particular circumstances yet adhering to the basic principles. Each is localised and autonomous but are also recognisable as u3as, having a Committee of Trustees, an affiliation to the National Committee and a network of busy, active interest groups of mature adults.

Swindon u3a was formed in 1988 by Norman Richards who had enjoyed a successful career in adult education, had himself been a mature student. After his retirement, he read about u3a and set about developing one in Swindon seeking funding from local charities and commercial companies such as Allied Dunbar. Later he became Vice-Chairman of the National Committee and was destined to play a major role in later u3a developments. He lives now in Chichester and is Swindon's Life President.

The story is a fascinating one. If you would like to know more why not read Eric Midwinter's history "500 Beacons – The u3a Story" or if you have an hour to spare watch his inaugural speech on YouTube "A Celebration of 1,000 u3as". (Be warned of his wicked sense of humour!)

Gill Brain



Friday Walking Group

Quenington to Bibury figure of 8 walk

On 17th September 2021, 17 of us met on The Green at Quenington. This was my fourth walk with the Friday Walking Group, each has been very enjoyable with a comfortable pace and well organised. An excellent information sheet is emailed in advance of each walk.

With Michael leading we set off for a 7 mile figure of 8 walk to Arlington Row in Bibury via the river Coln. It was almost perfect walking weather just enough sun to be enjoyably warm and enough cloud and breeze to stay comfortable.

A very short downhill along a minor road led to the river which we began to follow. Later after some open space and a pause to regroup, we ascended a short hill onto open fields. Pheasants are a common sight on these walks, this time a Ring Necked Pheasant was hiding in the bushes.

Roughly 3 miles and about 1½ hours from our start we descended into Bibury. Some always use sticks and some never. I like to have mine with me for steeper sections be it up or down.



Arriving through Arlington Row we had already passed several delightful cottages. In the near distance Bibury looked its normal busy self but Arlington Row was, as you can see, very quiet. This gave us the chance to enjoy the lovely setting without haste or pressure.

As with any group of people, we tend to spread out into pockets of 2 to 4 or more people, making conversation easier while walking. The river gave us another opportunity to gather into a cohesive group as we proceeded toward the church for lunch.



The leisurely lunch stop allowed plenty of time to explore the church. Inside, was a stained glass window, which had been used on a postage stamp (as



per our info sheet) along with an interesting information board.

The return route followed a similar pattern. A short hill, woods and open fields. Finally, we retraced the last few steps back to The Green where we started. A lovely walk, somewhere new for me, and I am finding that one of the great benefits of this group.

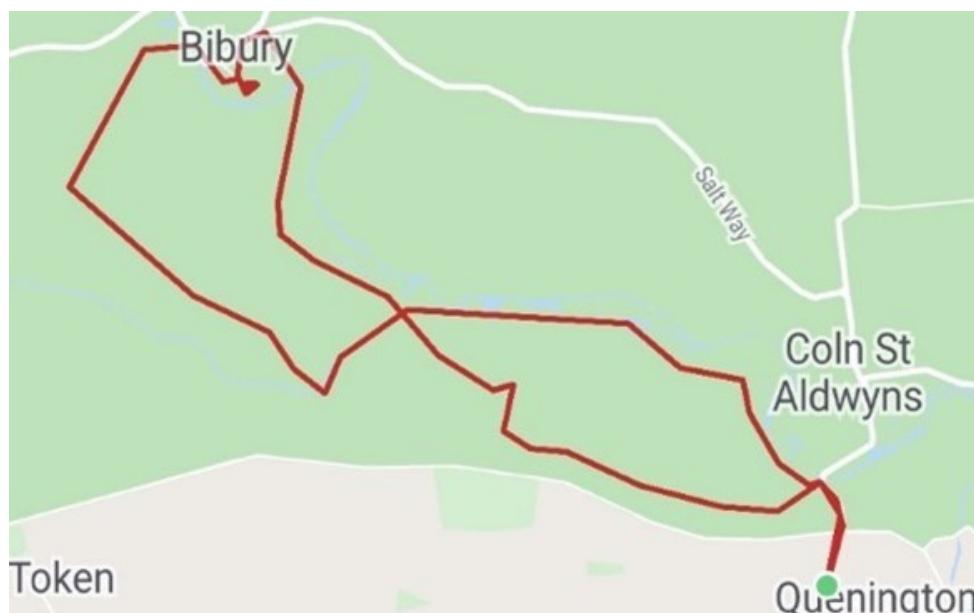
Loo breaks are as required, in bushes, and appropriate opportunities are suggested by the leader. The routes are well planned and there are pauses after steeper sections or where the group has got very spread out. There are usually a few

who know the route and also someone volunteering to be the back stop so no risk of getting lost.

Spending 3½ to 4 hours to do a 6 or 7 mile walk results in a relaxed day with plenty of time to chat with different people. The walking group is split in “A” and “B” without any real difference between them. They just walk alternate weeks to keep them more manageable. I find them a friendly welcoming bunch and am thoroughly enjoying my fortnightly walks. I am in one of the pictures, can you spot me!



Andrew Hancox



u3a 40th Anniversary 2022

Some of you have the Third Age Matters magazine (TAM) delivered to you. I always find it a good read. One article that caught my eye, was the fact that the u3a is 40 years old next year.

In order to celebrate this milestone the organisation is planning to help the environment in tandem with The Queen's Green Canopy Platinum Jubilee to plant 5000 native trees. The site for this woodland is on the eastern slope of Sugar Loaf Mountain within the Brecon Beacons.

I thought this was a brilliant idea and decided that I would buy a tree. I took this one stage further. I mentioned this scheme to my members at the Afternoon Social in Royal Wootton Bassett. My aim was to buy 10 trees and I asked members if they would like to contribute £1 towards the total of £55. I reached this total quickly with the generosity of my members, some contributing more. Having purchased 10 trees through The u3a Brand Centre, we now have as a group, a certificate in recognition of buying these trees. I also have money left over to buy one or two more.

If you are a Group Organiser maybe you could mention this to your groups. Members, you could mention this to your Group Organisers, or purchase a tree for just yourself.

I am sure you would agree this is a good cause in helping to reduce our carbon footprint.

John Turner

Group Organiser RWB - u3a Activities



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| | |
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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.

Copy Dates

Items for the December Newsletter must be received by

7th November

Items for the January Newsletter must be received by

4th December

All contributions must be sent to the Editor using the Newsletter contributions e-mail address shown opposite.

Geoff Bryan

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