

Exeter



1994-2014

Reflections

Always Forward Looking

The Objectives of the U3A

- 1. To advance the education of the public, and in particular, the education of older people no longer in full time gainful employment, in Exeter and the surrounding area.*
- 2. To provide facilities for leisure time and recreational activities, with the object of improving the conditions of life for the above in the interests of their social welfare.*

A Message from the Chairman

I was delighted to be asked to write a Welcome to this booklet. The author(s) show how an idea born 20 years ago grew and became U3A Exeter. U3A Exeter has welcomed many members over the years. They have enjoyed camaraderie, fun and exchange of ideas and knowledge. I hope U3A Exeter will continue to grow and expand, thus honouring the ideals of the first members and giving many people an added dimension in their Third Age.

Daphne Andrews
Chairman
Exeter U3A

Past and Present Officers of Exeter U3A:

Life President: James Stonall 2007-2008

Chairman

Janet Crocker	1994-1997	Sheila Ladner	2011-2012
Dennis Bushell	1997-2000	Ruth Sanders	2012-2014
Diana Jones	2000-2003	Daphne Andrews	2014-
Eileen J. Barber	2003-2006		
James Stonall	2006-2008		
Eileen Barber	2008-2010		
Shanne Lane	2010-2011		

Vice Chairman

Ron Silmon	2000-2009
Shanne Lane	2009-2010
Sheila Ladner	2010-2011
Roy Coster	2011-2012
Daphne Andrews	2013-present

Secretary

Christine Edwards	1994-2002
Mary Simmonds	2003-2007
{Margaret Aldini}	Joint
{Heather Gibson}	2007-2009
Rita Dampney	2009-2012
Sheila Ralls	2012-2013
Marion Ricketts	2013-present

Treasurer

Peter Fotheringale	1994-1995	Owen Bennett	2013-2014
Pam Eames	1995-1999	Keith Shaw	2014-
Paddy Pomphrey	1999-2004		
Hugh Money	2004-2008		
Gill Wills	2008-2010		
Jackie Sheperd	2010-2013		

Exeter U3A: 1994-1999

In the Beginning:

At an Up and Away day at St Luke's College in the spring of 1994, it was proposed by Professor Eric Midwinter (one of the three founder members of the U3A movement nationally), that a further attempt be made to start a U3A here in Exeter. Betty Rawle volunteered to take names and telephone numbers of anyone interested.

The first meeting was in September 1994, in Whipton Community Centre, with very few people attending. This followed three so-called 'fledgling' meetings to set up the organisation with a proper committee and it was decided, as a matter of urgency, that we seek a more central venue.

On January 26th 1995, at the first AGM, the following were elected: Chairman: Janet Crocker, Secretary: Christine Edwards, Treasurer: Pam Eames, Membership Secretary: Betty Rawle.

At the end of 1995 we moved to the music room at Exeter Central Library, an ideal location with coffee making facilities. The only disadvantage was that it would only seat 100 persons, should membership reach that number. There were 56 members in 1996, 80 in 1998 and the magic number of 105 was reached in 2001, taking 7 years to grow to 100 members.

Monthly Meetings:

A system of regular monthly meetings was established, which alternated at first between having a speaker and so-called open forums. The speakers were often our own members, their friends or from charities. They had to be inexpensive as funds were very low. At the open forums, groups reported back on their activities. We had general discussions, quizzes, questionnaires, anagrams etc, but many members preferred the sessions with a speaker.

Groups:

As early as 1996 there were already 8 groups, usually meeting in members' houses. These were: Literature, Poetry, Art, Music,

Bridge, History, Videos (the Greats) and Walking. The Poetry group sometimes read poems on a theme (seasons, creatures great and small) to entertain others such as the Stroke Club and Age Concern.

Events regionally and nationally:

Despite our small numbers in the first 5 years, we sent delegates to annual conferences of the U3A at Swansea, Edinburgh and Liverpool, and to discussions in London and Plymouth. Delegates reported back either in the AGM or via the newsletter. An important milestone was achieved in October 1997, when Janet and Christine attended a meeting, chaired by Phyllis Babb of the NEC, at Plymouth University, to try to launch a U3A in Plymouth. Janet also agreed to act as Regional contact and was subsequently elected to the NEC.

We also wrote to the national U3A expressing dismay when we heard that other U3As were visiting Exeter and not contacting us. Our letter was published and afterwards other groups did make contact, with some of us meeting members from West Wilts and Aylesbury, taking them on tours of the city and the cathedral.

Christine Edwards

The Church Research Group:

Pam Eames coordinated this group, which flourished from 2001 to 2008. During those years members visited many churches, abbeys and chapels; some Exeter ones of course, but also others from further afield in Cornwall, Somerset and Dorset.

The group assembled monthly on a set day, at an agreed meeting point in Exeter where we shared cars and proceeded to the first church. As an example – in May 2003, after leaving Exeter, Ron and Val Silmon led us to the church at Blisland in Cornwall; they had previously researched its history and interesting facts about it, which they proceeded to share with us. They then led us on to the social event - lunch at a lovely pub in Tregadillet. John Eames next led us to the twelfth century church of St Mary Magdalene in Launceston which has beautiful granite carvings all around the outside.

Each of our days followed the same pattern, with individuals or couples doing the initial research (the learning, educational aspect of

U3A), and all sharing the pub lunch (the social bit), trying to ensure that the morning and afternoon churches were not too far apart.

Pam Eames



The
Church
Research
Group at
Morwen-
stow
Church

The Group
enjoying a
pub lunch at
The Otter
Inn, Colaton
Raleigh



Personal Experiences:

August 1994: Jean and I saw our neighbour Sheila Parson, who told us a group of ladies was going to start a U3A in Exeter and would we be interested to join.

So on September 8th 1994 Jean and I went to Whipton Church which is now a Community Hall to join U3A. I remember we were given cards to put down the subjects we would be interested in; one was History under Janet Crocker which Jean and I joined. The first History meeting was at Tinley's Tea Rooms on September 19th, which we attended with some fears. On November 1st Jean joined a Sewing group under Christine Hiscock.

At a U3A meeting in Whipton on October 27th, two members (Fred and Nina Glover) gave a talk on Hypnotism, and then hypnotised Janet Crocker who was the Chairperson at that time.

Jean and Geoff Cleveland

My introduction to the U3A was by a lady who walked up the road at the same time as I was going home! We started to talk, and she told me she belonged to the U3A, but as there was no group in Exeter she went to the Honiton branch to teach French. The lady was Miss Christine Edwards!

Later she told me that she was hoping to start a class in Exeter and would I be interested. I said I would, and with a few others, we met at Christine's home to discuss the possibilities of starting a French group. I was 'tasked' to contact the Express and Echo with a proposal to them to advertise the inauguration of a U3A in Exeter. Sadly, after a short time I had to give up for personal reasons.

Sheila Parsons

Exeter U3A: 1999-2005

Personal Experiences:

We joined Exeter U3A circa 1998, and between us had the roles of Membership Secretary and Treasurer. Hugh also organised the Discussion and Science groups, plus having a major impact on the forthcoming website. Mary was the Wine Group leader from 2006-2011.

We thought the groups we belonged to were giving us a good social outlet as well as being educational.

The Out and About group was an inexpensive and informative way to learn about the West Country. Likewise with the Church Research group, where we also had an opportunity to participate.

The Library room was used for monthly meetings, and also, because of the facilities offered, for the social events that Exeter U3A organised, such as the annual summer buffet and entertainment.

The Newsletters too were informative, with plenty of humour, weather and folklore snippets, and many interesting recipes.

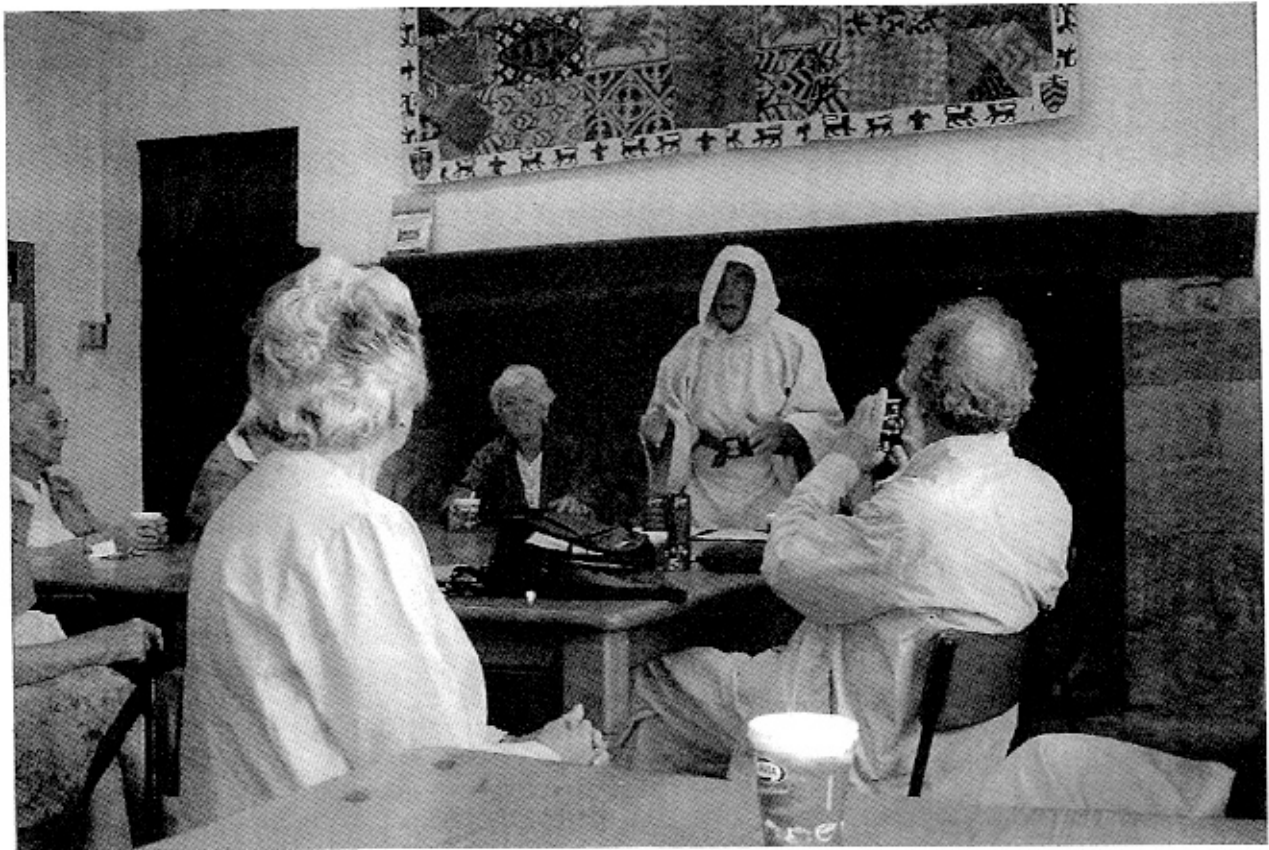
Although not organised by our own U3A, we enjoyed three holidays organised by National U3A.

Hugh and Mary Money

We joined Exeter U3A in 1996, and are both past Committee members. Ron was Vice Chairman for many years and Val is still Welfare Secretary. Val took over the History 2 Group in 2011 and Ron still ran the Fun Quiz regularly right up to his death, sadly in January 2014.

After joining the U3A we soon became accustomed to this new dimension in our lives. We found the idea of continued learning, with such groups as History and Video Greats (run by Dennis Bushell) most enjoyable.

Much to our surprise and pleasure, we became actively involved and participated in other groups, such as Poetry, Church Research, Wine Tasting and Local History.



The Out & About Group at Cleeve Abbey

We suppose our crowning success and enjoyment was the introduction of the Out and About Group, visiting well over 100 different venues between 1996 and 2011, using a car sharing scheme. For example, we went to Sherborne Abbey and Ford Abbey, plus coach trips to Winchester, Wells and Gloucester Cathedrals. We looked forward to our Christmas Get Together at Exeter College, as well as our Annual Summer Buffet, when we invariably took part in the entertainment.

Another milestone, perhaps a little more sedate and official, was our 10th Anniversary Luncheon celebration (see later), held in the Chapter House of Exeter Cathedral, with the Deputy Mayor in attendance.



The Out & About Group at Cadhay

Overall, we found that joining the Exeter U3A was a complete success, both socially and educationally.

Ron and Val Silmon

My three years as chairman (2000-2003) were such a pleasure, with an easy, calm atmosphere, and with few problems such as finance. I also organised the History Group and the Book Group. The Library room was perfect as a meeting place, with the sound and screen apparatus working perfectly. There were much smaller numbers then, which made it easy to make friends, welcome new members properly and make them feel wanted in a relaxed atmosphere. There were good opportunities for socialising. The summer buffet was low key though hard work. Many members contributed to the work but it was so enjoyable. The Out and About group outings and the Church Research were occasions that are remembered with much pleasure.

Diana Jones

Exeter U3A 10th Birthday Celebrations:

2004 was the 10th birthday of Exeter U3A. the occasion was celebrated with a birthday lunch, organised by the Social Secretary Joan Oates and assistant Kay Bushell. It was held at the Chapter House of the Cathedral on June 25th, and was attended by some forty members. Our guests were the Deputy mayor Rachel Lyons and her consort.

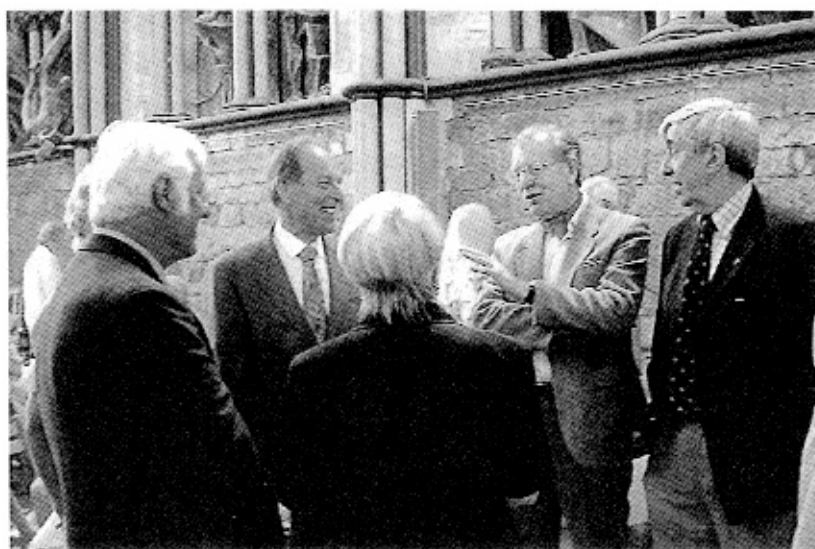
A sampler, stitched by Paddy Pomphrey, to celebrate the occasion, graced the table alongside the birthday cake.

Eileen Barber



Founder members with Chairman Eileen Barber (left): Betty Rawle, Janet Crocker, Alan and Amelia Redding, Christine Edwards, and with the Deputy Mayor Rachel Lyons & consort. Exeter U3A 10th Anniversary

Socialising in the Chapter House, 10th Anniversary, showing James Stonall (Life President)



Exeter U3A: 2005-2010

Visit by French Group – 2005:

Audrey Cook, then a regular member of Exeter U3A, writes to tell of how the French Groups active in U3A helped with a visit of a group from Rennes. Both Alan Simmonds, who gave the tour of the Cathedral, and Christine Edwards, plus several of the group members were involved.

“Out of the blue, I had a letter from a lady I had stayed with in Rennes on a twinning Trip some years previously.

She belonged to the English Club in Rennes, and her group were planning a 4/5 day coach trip to the West Country. They wondered if I could arrange some sightseeing in Exeter.

I decided my first port of call would be my friends in U3A. So we organised a quick tour of the City Centre, followed by a conducted visit to the Cathedral.

We met the Deputy Lord Mayor (married to a French lady) in the Guildhall, followed by a cream tea. There wasn't a lot of time, but we didn't waste any, and both sides enjoyed the experience. The gentleman I was talking to was proud of the fact that he had been born on the same day as our Queen.

He gave a graphic account of the D Day landings, when he was 15 year old and had spent 5 days in the caves above Caen.”

Audrey Cook

Exeter Study Day: October 17th 2007

As part of the U3A South West Link programme, Exeter organised a Study Day. About 80 SW U3A members gathered in the cathedral Chapter House for two excellent talks.

Firstly, James Coulter talked about the development and possible origins of 'The Green Man', the well-known representation of a man with foliage growing out of his head. The many examples of this in churches and cathedrals led him to suggest a Christian association, as well as the usual pagan themes (Jack-in-the-Green etc). Perhaps this came from mediaeval Mystery Plays showing Adam dying, with seeds of the Tree of Life being planted in his mouth?

A buffet lunch was followed by a talk from Dr Adnan Al-Daini, who spoke on Islam and its teachings. He showed how human rights are approached in Islam, which recognises the humanity of all. He illustrated this with various quotes from the Qur'an, concluding with the saying of the prophet Mohammed, "God will not show mercy to him who does not show mercy to others".

The whole day proved to be very interesting and informative.

Mary Simmonds



Green Man in the Lady Chapel, Exeter Cathedral

Size Matters. 2008-2009:

There can be few groups in Exeter that have grown so rapidly in numbers as the Exeter U3A.

In 2008 member numbers were around 90-100 and that meant that monthly meetings could be held comfortably in the Music Room at Exeter Library. Then suddenly something happened and things were not so comfortable as the group had outgrown the Library, where the limit was 100 people.

Not wishing to turn new members away the committee decided to have associate members. They could pay a reduced annual subscription and be able to attend classes, but not attend the monthly meeting.

This continued for just over a year but understandably was not a success as associate members felt 'left out'.

The committee decided that they could take one of several paths:

1. Make changes to the way U3A was managed
2. Look for new premises
3. Hold two monthly meetings
4. Cap the numbers and have a waiting list (Head Office were against this).
5. Form another Exeter U3A
6. Make the main meeting self-financing. This would enable the U3A to look at venues that were currently thought to be too expensive.

It was decided by the committee to look for new premises. A sub-group was formed called Size Matters. The members were Roy Coster, Jan Dolland, Christine Edwards, Beryl Gethen-Smith and Ron Silmon. Exeter was combed for a suitable room that would cover all the needs for members. The committee also decided that it was important to circulate a questionnaire to members before any changes were made.

1. It needed to be central
2. It had to be had at a reasonable cost
3. It had to have equipment for showing film plus black out blinds
4. It needed to have an area to serve refreshments
5. It needed to have adequate heating

It was only then that it was discovered that Exeter lacked such premises that would cover all needs. Many venues were investigated and the results of this are all on file. We looked at The Barnfield Theatre, St Sidwell Methodist Church, The Mint Methodist Church, Southernhay United Reform Church, The Salvation Army Hall and the Ensign Club.

Eventually Palace Gate, aka South Street Baptist Church was chosen by the committee. It covered most of the needs, apart from the suitability of equipment to show films and the lack of blackout blinds – and it could be chilly!

In the meantime, the Mint Methodist Church had had some refurbishment and the committee decided to move there in 2011.

Beryl Gethen-Smith (former Membership Secretary)

2009 was an unsettled year. The rising membership was a large concern for the committee as members were having to be turned away from the General Meeting at the Music Room of the Library when the safety limit of 100 was reached.

The AGM was held at the Barnfield Theatre, which was only rarely available. After wandering from free venue to free venue the committee meetings were held at a room in the Baptist Church in South Street at a cost of £10. It was decided that we could afford to rent the main room in the Baptist Church for our General Meeting and it could seat 200 plus. Despite some drawbacks it suited us, as it had a large coffee area. But after a year they decided to change their seating from benches to chairs and this would mean a reduction in the number it could seat. Fortunately, the Mint Methodist Church soon finished its comprehensive restoration and it became our new home.

Rita Dampney (former Secretary)

Exeter U3A: 2010-present

The past 3 years has seen an increase in members, from 235 in February 2010 to more than 400 at the end of 2013. With this there has been an increase in the number of interest groups, rising from 40 to a current 62! At the beginning of the period, there was some concern at the lack of groups linked with physical activity. By contrast, there are now groups for Keep Fit and two levels of walking - Local Walks and Stride Out for those with an appetite for something more strenuous. In addition, some members regularly join with Tiverton U3A for Country Dancing.

The search for adequate premises both for general meetings and group meetings has continued to be an issue during this period, together with the concern over room hire costs.

In 2010, there was an Exeter U3A Open Day which the Lord Mayor attended to represent our link with the City Council. This link was endorsed in 2012 when Exeter U3A was given permission to use the Exeter City Crest on its website. Also in 2010, links were strengthened with Exeter University and with Exeter Library.

In 2011, the increase in membership led to a change of venue for monthly meetings from Exeter Library to the Mint Methodist Church which could cater for a larger number.

Two very successful social occasions that year were the January Tea Party followed later on by the Summer Buffet. Also this year, Exeter U3A took part in Adult Learners' Week in the Library. Reflecting the increase in groups and membership, a booklet, Guidelines for Group Leaders, was produced.

2012 was marked by two key events – the London Olympics and the 30th Anniversary of the University of the Third Age. As part of celebrations for the London Olympics, Tiverton U3A organised a Coast-to-Coast Walk from Lynmouth to Exmouth, following the route of the river Exe.

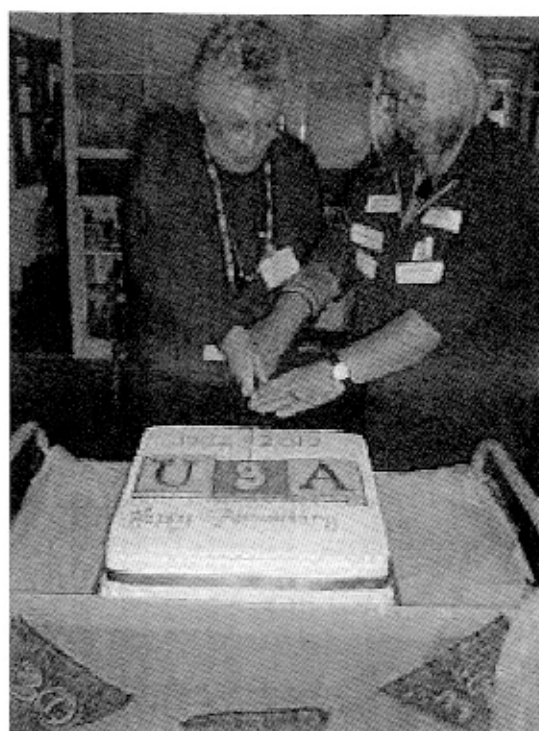


This was supported by Exeter U3A walkers, many of whom walked sections of the walk with two completing the whole trek. Exeter U3A took responsibility for organising the section of the walk from Exeter to Darts Farm. A special event was arranged at Exeter Quay where walkers were welcomed by the Exeter Chairman and Committee and members together with the Deputy Mayor of Exeter. Members generously provided squash and homemade cakes to help walkers on their way through the city and a local band was on hand to liven up the occasion.



Later in November, there was a successful event to mark the 30th Anniversary at South Street Baptist Church with lively social activities together with music from the Exeter U3A Choir, a birthday cake and an inspiring talk from Beth Butler, a recent vice-chair of the national committee.

Cutting the birthday cake: Beth Butler and Ruth Sanders (chairman).



2012 saw the start of the Coffee and Chat sessions. These occasions provide an opportunity to welcome new members and to enable them to find out about the wide range of different interest groups and make contact with group leaders. In addition they are enjoyed by existing members as a good opportunity to socialise.

In relation to external activities, in 2012 Exeter U3A helped to set up Exmouth U3A and also embarked on its first Shared Learning Project with the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, which resulted in a leaflet intended to raise interest in the artefacts relating to Time. In 2013, a Shared Learning Project with Poltimore House concluded with a small exhibition reflecting on the latter days of its use in the early NHS years as a hospital.

2013 up to the present has been an exciting but also challenging time for Exeter U3A, trying to meet the demands for new and different types of interest groups from an increasing and diverse membership. Some difficult decisions have had to be made regarding how to finance and sustain this new growth, which in itself is evidence of the energy and enthusiasm of Exeter U3A.

Trudi Learmouth

Two members who joined Exeter U3A in the period 2010-present give their personal views on what membership has meant to them:

"I have been a member of U3A from September 2011, and enjoying it very much! Although daunting sometimes, because I found out most people had more education than me! But I have plodded on. This may put some people off from joining, or only going for the first time. I feel they should be encouraged to come to the Monthly Meetings at first because, these are always interesting.

I had known for a while of U3A, but it was when I was in Spain that I joined in Fuengirola. I lived in Benalmadena so I went by train! In Exeter U3A, I am in a few groups - History 2, Great Lives, Mythology, Art History, Debating (hope it comes back) and Discussion Circle which was my first group, and made VERY welcome. Even though I found out later, there were a Professor, a Scientist, 3 Teachers, a Physiologist in it - phew! I am learning so much and enjoying it too. Alas I only have 3 'O' levels... but now....

I have made lots of friends but not to go out for coffees as I am too busy.

I have by word of mouth, encouraged people to join, and sent copies of the Newsletter to my friends in other parts of England.

What a wealth of knowledge I have acquired! (if only it would stay in but alas old age)"

Lynda Dunkley

"I first heard about U3A in 1989 from a rambling companion in Hants. Immediately afterwards I went to the Caribbean and stayed there for 20 years. We lived in a 'one-horse town', with no European culture, except an intermittent BBC World Service and books. When I returned to the UK, I made a beeline for my nearest U3A. My first meeting was a history group on Anne of Cleves - and I was hooked. I'd recommend U3A to most of my friends, but I'd suggest they plunge into a group before a general meeting where probably people won't talk to you because the general meetings are too big and a bit of a crush.

I use U3A to plug the holes in my knowledge, e.g. I go to science because we didn't do science in school; and to art because I've always wanted to have a go - and I can see myself improving so I keep going; also history and weather, for fun! The groups make me realize I know more than I thought I knew - and that is confidence boosting. And it shows me how we can learn from each other by simply asking. I've made a couple of good U3A friends, as well as meeting lots of very pleasant men and women through my groups. I wish there were time to do all the classes I'm interested in, but babysitting grandchildren has to take precedence."

Renee Terry

Acknowledgements:

1994-1999

Geoff Cleveland
Jean Cleveland
Janet Crocker
Pam Eames
Christine Edwards
Betty Rawle
Alan Reading

1999-2005

Diana Jones
Hugh Money
Mary Money
Ron Silmon
Val Silmon

2005-2010

Eileen Barber
Rita Dampney
Beryl Gethen-Smith
Mary Simmonds

2010-2014

Linda Dunkley
Trudi Learmouth
Renee Terry