



Celebrating the first 20 years of Sevenoaks U3A



University of the Third Age

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www.sevenoaksu3a.org.uk

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Foreword

This publication marks the first twenty years of the progress and success of Sevenoaks U3A since its inception in 1994 by our founding Chairman, Magda Sweetland. Little did the founding members know how successful their U3A would be. We are part of a growing national organisation of over 320,000 members. In Sevenoaks we have reflected this growth and are now approaching 1,000 members.

Within this publication you will find much about our history and growth together with comments on what the U3A means to some of our members. We have evolved into a large U3A and this is reflected in the wide range of self-help groups, meetings and social activities we are able to offer. However, this does depend on teamwork and the willingness of our members to offer help in organising and running groups and events for the benefit of everyone.

In recognition of our 20th Anniversary I would like to acknowledge the contribution you have all made to our success; this publication is a tribute to the hard work everyone has tirelessly put in over the years to make Sevenoaks U3A the success it is today.

On behalf of the Executive Committee may I thank you all as we move into the future and continue the success we have enjoyed over the past twenty years.

Bob Ruffles
Chairman Sevenoaks U3A
chairman@sevenoaksu3a.org.uk

April 2014

*"The end of your career is not the end!
U3A can kick start a totally new one."*

The Very Beginning

The idea of a U3A in Sevenoaks took root in the autumn of 1993 and by March 1994, its planners were sufficiently confident to put a notice in *The Sevenoaks Chronicle*, headed **University to cater for the over 50s**. It ended, 'Anyone interested, willing to join a steering committee or act as a tutor or co-ordinator is asked to contact Nigel Britten or Magda Sweetland.' This drew in support from several Sevenoaks residents, who quickly formed a steering committee which, for six months, worked hard at publicising the proposed U3A and writing to relevant organisations and individuals involved with the 'retired' age group.

The founders shared a strongly held idea of what they wanted to see in a Sevenoaks U3A: they believed the Study Groups were paramount as they distinguish U3A from other 'retirement' organisations. Sevenoaks represents an impressive pool of talent, not only retired academics and professionals but also brilliant amateur enthusiasts who were quickly convinced of the value of U3A.

The Town Council gave a start-up grant of £100 and a local designer created an impressive leaflet; *The Chronicle* gave the proposed Sevenoaks U3A front page billing, all of which helped to make the launch on 7th September 1994 a rousing success. Over 200 people came to the Community Centre that afternoon and many joined at once – a great act of faith! Norman Richards from National Office, Peter Batts and Florence Summerskill all spoke and conveyed both the energy of the organisation nationally and the importance of continuing education.

What Happened Next?

The first five years saw a rapid expansion. Membership increased from the initial 120 in 1994 to 407 in 1999; the number of groups increased from 8 in 1994 to 56 in 1999.

The First Study Groups

Local Studies	Researching the History of a House
German Conversation	Money Management
What is Art?	A Book Circle
Botanical Painting	Britain within the European Union

Twenty years later, five members who volunteered to lead groups then, are still doing so, though not all lead the same group. More social initiatives were set up early on; the Pub Lunch group started, together with walks and leisure activities, which the U3A organisers had not initially envisaged.



L to R: Brian Simpson, Gwyneth Miller, Florence Summerskill, Frank Haynes, Magda Sweetland, John Gandon, Nigel Britten, Clare Bowerman, Walter Reay, John Boston

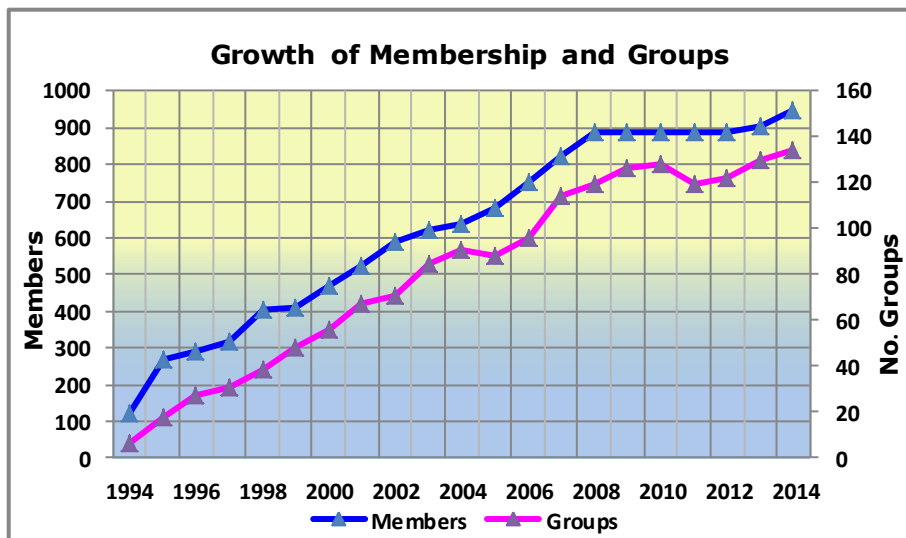
*Photo: The late Dudley Mills
Feb 1995*

*First Discussion Group:
"Britain within the European Union"*

Even by 2004, Sevenoaks U3A qualified as a 'large' U3A with 622 members; the formation of Knole U3A in 2009 proved to be very helpful in that this enabled the formation of some specialist shared groups when neither U3A had a viable number to function on its own; there are now fifteen.

Today our U3A is approaching 1000 members and has over 130 study groups. It is a concept of shared learning that is exceptional – long may it continue to thrive.

"Unexpected opportunities in all directions: studies and people."



The above graph illustrates the steady growth of our U3A

The Evolution of the Groups

Literature and Languages

The Book Circle proved to be a most popular leisure activity and this was quickly followed by Poetry Groups and Short Story writing in 1997. Today these subjects are represented by twelve groups. German Conversation led to other languages being offered: French, Italian, Spanish, Arabic, Greek and Latin. Russian put in a brief appearance in 2006 as did Welsh in 2009.

History and Local Studies

Various aspects of History have also inspired Groups. There are now seventeen under this heading; subjects include Classical and Medieval Studies, Family, Houses, Art, Transport, Industrial, Military, Makers of History and Taking an Age.

Today there is a wide range of groups covering Local and London Studies; the latter was a bright idea whilst waiting to get into the Bank of England on an Open House visit.

Society

From the outset members were interested in Current Affairs, European and Financial matters, which continue to attract members, as do the specialist topics of Philosophy, Women in the World and Migration.

Arts and Drama

The first group under the general heading of '**Arts Appreciation**' was 'What is Art?' Others quickly followed with the formation in 1997



Jewellery making

of the Opera Group and the first Gallery Group. There are now thirteen such groups including Churches, Films, Music Appreciation, Opera, Theatre Studies and Jazz. '**Practical Arts**' started with Botanical Art and was followed by Sculpture, Pottery, Singing for Fun, Recorder Playing, Jewellery Making and Embroidery.

The History of Cricketts Farm at Borough Green

With the interest and growth in art activities a facility was required to accommodate the practical arts. This needed space and storage for all of the equipment and ongoing projects that members were working on.

Pamela Murphy writes: "In the beginning there was John Bonnett who brought tidings of another U3A who had a Hobby House. Maybe that was just what was needed for Sevenoaks - and the message was spread around. John Bonnett, Magda Sweetland and Ramon Higgs made a plea in the Newsletter for anyone to come forth who might have suitable accommodation to house some arts groups. And lo and behold, there appeared the miraculous Jim and Sonya Bailey offering room inCricketts Farm. There was indeed room and it was in abundance".

The approach of the Millennium seemed a very good time to set things going. Housed in a Portacabin and under the tutorship of Patrick Moore, Sculpture was soon in production. Sonya carved an enormous statue which eventually guarded the entrance to the house. Soon another Portacabin was occupied by a painting group which was arranged on a self-help basis with artists helping each other. This concept was found to work well and is still the mainstay of the group.



"Hoedown at Cricketts Creek"

Shortly afterwards Woodcarving appeared led by Ramon in the old stable, and then Pottery opened in the unused calf buildings with Maysel Dawson. These were soon joined by Sculpture, Still Life, Drawing and Painting. In 2003 a drama group was set up by Pamela Murphy using Cricketts for rehearsals for "The Peasenhall Murder" by Maeve Bhavan and staged in her grounds in Offham. After this it was used for rehearsals for our 10th

Anniversary Party. It was then agreed that Cricketts should be the actual venue for staging and that was when the Bullring Theatre was born. Jim, with a rush of enthusiasm, built a stage with a proscenium arch that gave a more professional air to the venue. This was the home of at least one production a year including Music Hall, Murder Mystery and one-act plays. "Hoedown at Cricketts Creek" was fun on one of the lawns.

In 2010 Sonya started a writing group in her kitchen (cosily warmed by the AGA). The group is still running, but in other people's houses.

To start with, Ann Evans was the liaison between the Executive Committee and Cricketts Farm. As the membership grew she decided to stay with the sculpture group and the post was passed to Pamela Murphy. At one time Cricketts was the annual venue for the Group Leaders' Summer Lunch, sometimes as a huge barbecue, which was a very successful social event.

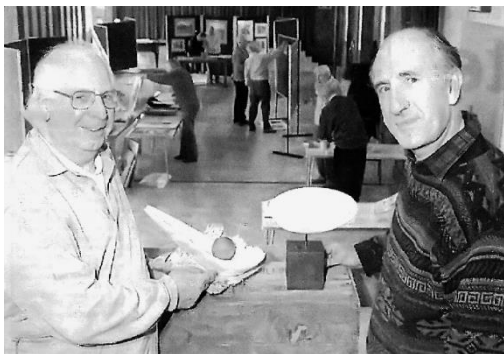
Each summer there was an outing for all the groups who belonged to Cricketts, usually by coach; the last one to Petworth House was a

splendid way to spend the day with many friends. The groups have now dispersed, apart from painting and sculpture, which are at Knole Academy East, but, unfortunately, not for much longer. How Cricketts Farm is missed! Maybe it will inspire another miracle!

"Stimulation, enjoyment, company of like-minded people, fun."

U3A Art Exhibitions

It was decided with the advent of the Millennium, that an Arts Exhibition be held at Walthamstow Hall Junior School for all members. The exhibition was set up in the gym hall with wall bars as a backdrop. The thirty exhibitors and invited guests enjoyed a Preview and Reception after a hectic day hanging and placing all the various items; we even managed to have an article and a photograph in the Sevenoaks Chronicle!



*Ramon Higgs and Michael Glasspool
at the U3A Art Exhibition*

The event was a great success and it was decided to repeat the exhibition two years later, thereby allowing the artists time to produce new work. April 2002 arrived and we were back at the same venue. The method of hanging improved from lessons learnt at the previous exhibition. In addition, a decision was made to increase the interval between Exhibitions to three years and the venue was

changed to Bradbourne School where there was more space and no wall bars!

In April 2005 the move to Bradbourne School (now Knole Academy) provided us with a new challenge. The school pupils had an excellent reputation for Art and the space was more like an Art Gallery, with good lighting and greater provision for the display of pictures and sculpture. The number of exhibits and exhibitors more than doubled over the period. The new venue was successful for both artists and

visitors. Further exhibitions were held there in 2008 and 2011 and all have been very worthwhile and appreciated by both U3A members and the general public.

Photography

In 2001 there were no photographic groups but in 2014 we have ten listed in our Handbook. Nine of these groups' titles start with the word 'Digital' but there is a variety in their approach. Three of the groups are for beginners and improvers who learn how to manipulate images. The other Camera Groups' activities vary from taking and manipulating images, field trips, video imaging and visits to exhibitions and galleries. There have also been Photographic Competitions and Workshops.

Photography must claim to have been the fastest growing subject in the twenty years of Sevenoaks U3A.

Mary Allwood writes: "I was lucky to join at a time when great changes were beginning. I started my Group, simply called Photography, in 2002, and three members joined, two of whom still belong! We were all using film at that time. I was quickly dragged into the Digital Age and am happily settled there. In my group we have an ongoing challenge each year, the latest one being to supply images for use on the Sevenoaks U3A Website, one photograph for each group or activity. Twenty years ago this would all have sounded like science fiction".

The snowballing of photographic groups in our U3A is a sure indication of the increasing popularity of the subject and of our members' desire to learn more. The digital camera is a very significant part of the computer revolution; wherever you go someone is snapping away at a social event, in the street and even in shops and supermarkets.

It is a new world as far as photography is concerned and the digital revolution moves at an ever increasing speed. Now many people have cameras on their mobile phones and use them frequently. Where we will be in another twenty years is beyond our imagination!



IN A REFLECTIVE MOOD
"In a reflective mood"- Photography Group

The Science Groups

Do you know about recent advances in DNA sequencing, or the properties of Ball Lightning, or how to minimise the ageing of your brain? You would if you had attended three of the Science Group's recent talks, which are open to all U3A members.

The Science Group is nearly as old as Sevenoaks U3A. John Pitcher, John Simpson and John Bonnett started it in 1995. There have been three Chairmen - John Pitcher, who began in 1995, was succeeded by Frank Matthews in 2006 and Win Gutteridge in 2012.

In the early years there were talks entitled The Study of Genetics and DNA, Healthy Eating, Weather, Herbal Medicine, Probing the Atom and Climate Change, visits to Hove Engineerium, Kew Gardens, Chatham Dockyard and the Steam and Music Museums at Kew Bridge, not to mention two very successful study days on Climate Change in 2008 and Food Sustainability in 2009.

Today the Committee includes members with a broad knowledge of science, technology and engineering who aim to provide a balance of talks across all disciplines.

The objective of the talks is to help U3A members keep abreast of current scientific thinking as so much progress is being made in the science that affects our lives: the food we eat and headlines about BSE; genetically-engineered foods and horse meat; the sources of energy such as wind farms, nuclear power, shale gas; and the ongoing debate about global warming spring to mind. The only certainty is that this trend is set to continue.

The Committee also organises two or three outings each year. The focus here is on scientific and engineering topics which are best



*New recruits to the COOK Food
Factory in Sittingbourne 2013*

covered visually or hands-on. There have been visits to the Enigma Museum at Bletchley Park and the Shepherd Neame Brewery in Faversham. Visits in 2014 will include a repeat tour of the COOK factory at Sittingbourne, a visit to the National Physical Laboratory and a trip to the Farnborough Air Sciences Trust Museum.

There are also two Science discussion groups. The first, started in January 2005 by John Eastwood, was called the Science History and Practice Study Group. In 2006/7 it became the Science Discussion Study Group. These groups cover a wide range of topics and themes. In addition, specialist groups have formed covering areas such as Ethical Dilemmas, Geology and Our Universe.

*"Study groups give everyone a chance without
(too much) compulsion."*

Leisure and Social Activities

Many of our members enjoy leisure activities. Six walking groups cater for different degrees of fitness. There is also Bird Watching, Tai Chi and Circle Dancing. The adventurous members of Jim Purves's Cycling Group recently cycled to Paris. Not quite so physically demanding are the six Gardening Groups, catering both for garden visits and discussion. Less physically strenuous activities include wine appreciation, chess, crosswords, bridge, whist, and Scrabble.



*Jim Purves's Cycling Group –
Sevenoaks to Paris*

*"Mental, physical and organising activities; U3A is good
for the brain and the body."*

Social Events

Social events have been a part of our U3A since the beginning. The enthusiastic uptake of places on theatre trips and day visits to places of interest showed us that there was a demand for much more, so in 2007 the Social Events Committee was formed; the core members of that committee are still serving. Looking back over the seven years, the achievements are notable. John Dean successfully masterminded visits to the Loire Valley, Northern Spain, Croatia, Portugal and Sicily, as well as to the Scottish Highlands. Magda Sweetland put together a series of fascinating short spring holidays in Oxfordshire, Derbyshire, Suffolk, York and Gloucester. The good hotels and innovative itineraries were much appreciated. Jenny Smith ably led many very successful day coach trips, which catered for a wide range of members' interests. Visits to museums and galleries are always popular. Local visits such as Titsey Place, Penshurst, Edenbridge and Chiddingstone Castle are well taken up as members can drive themselves.



London Studies Group with a "new recruit"



Inspecting the Jubilee bells at



General Meeting in the Sevenoaks Community Centre



New Members' Coffee Morning November 2013

For many years Lynda Alleeson arranged a New Year Festive Lunch at Westerham Golf Club. The committee also organised Summer Lunches for group leaders at different venues. These events have now been replaced by a biennial Group Organisers' Conference.



*Visit to Suffolk 2011 –
Long Melford Church*

The Committee's finances have been meticulously recorded by the treasurer Mike Dudding, who succeeded Bill Taylor in 2009. They are now in the hands of Sue Christy. As Sevenoaks U3A celebrates its 20th Anniversary, the Social Events Committee looks to the future with optimism; new members are being welcomed as some of the team retire, having contributed so much over the years. New ideas for

visits or holidays are sought from members and the possibility of linking some activities with study groups and talks will be pursued.

It is hoped that this committee will always be at the forefront of a programme which brings members together, to share experiences and enjoy the pleasure that comes from adding to our knowledge and interests in a happy social environment.

General Meetings and Talks



Ann Howard's Catering Team

We have been fortunate to have enjoyed a wide and varied range of talks over the years. The programme is organised by a small team and refreshments are provided for up to 200 people on the day. Ann Howard manages the team of tea and cake makers.

Thanks are due to Bryan Richardson, Carole Andrews and Lynn Mead, who have been responsible for finding the speakers for the Monthly Meetings. Jonathan Fenner's illustrated talks - on iconic buildings of London and on Kentish architecture - were delivered with great enthusiasm and extensive knowledge. The historian Dr Kate Williams was both entertaining and informative on Emma Hamilton and the young Queen Victoria. Everyone who heard Steve Pendleton's experiences as a young soldier in Northern Ireland will remember his account of the injuries he sustained in a helicopter crash. He lost a leg, became blind, and is deaf in one ear but his talk was both moving and at times hilarious, thanks to his wonderful sense of humour.

You may remember Joy Hooper, who gave a fascinating illustrated talk about Thomas Cook and the development of foreign travel. We also benefited greatly from the detailed knowledge and personal insights of Robert Sackville-West on Knole and the Sackville family.

On his first visit, Liam D'Arcy-Brown spoke about The Grand Canal of China; more recently his subject was Chusan: The Opium Wars and the Forgotten Story of Britain's First Chinese Island. Imogen Corrigan talked enthusiastically and knowledgeably about the Treasure at Sutton Hoo, bringing to life the burial site, its discovery and fabulous treasures. Diana Small, a Blue Badge Guide and Adult Education Lecturer, talked of the development of the City of London from Roman to present times.

Frank Matthews spoke on Women flying Spitfires. This drew on his U3A publication relating how women made a significant contribution in support of the RAF before and during the war by ferrying unarmed aircraft. Brian Beeley's talk about the Arab Spring and its impact on the Middle East, and on Syria in particular, was very apposite.

Do you remember Geoff Hutchinson, who was Kipling for the afternoon, Jean Bruce who told us all about the history of ladies' underwear, and Jacqueline Leach from Bore Place, who started by passing smelly samples of silage around the audience?

In addition to the Monthly Meetings, Sevenoaks U3A has run some 30 study days offering a diverse range of topics since 2000. We have also enjoyed study days arranged by neighbouring U3As. There have been too many to list but topics covered included historical subjects

such as Tudor Cookery and political subjects such as the Third World. 'Changing the way Britain is Governed' was presented by Baroness Gillian Shephard. Other popular study days have addressed health issues, gardening and family history.

Keeping in Touch

Publications



*Newsletter distribution team led by
Colin and Mary Butson*

The Newsletter, with its various flyers and inserts, and the annual Handbook, with its details of the forthcoming programme for the year and all the study groups available, have both been issued since the inception of Sevenoaks U3A. Both have gradually become longer, reflecting the growth of the organisation and the huge range of activities undertaken by members.

"U3A helps make the most of every spare minute."

U3A Third Age Matters is delivered to all members, giving them a good picture of national activities and available resources, as well as introducing them to the members of the National Executive Committee, who work hard to promote U3A countrywide and argue constantly for opportunities for the retired learner to be extended.

Over recent years a number of Sevenoaks U3A publications have been produced on various topics, some by enterprising groups working together on a study group theme, others by individual U3A members who have researched a topic and then published their findings. These are:

2008	Thoughts from Barnoldswick <i>by Ken Wilson & Pat Head</i>
2008	Writing for Fun <i>by Pat Head & others</i>
2009	Retirement in Sevenoaks <i>by Clover Lawrence & others</i>
2009	Reading the Century <i>by Jill Webster & others</i>
2009/10	A Vegetarian Feast, Parts one and two <i>by Gilly Moysey & others</i>
2010	Bygone Industries of North Kent <i>by Frank Matthews</i>
2011	Time to Learn in Sevenoaks <i>by Celia Smith & Magda Sweetland</i>
2011	Classical Music in Sevenoaks <i>by Magda Sweetland</i>
2012	Achieving Women <i>by Sue Henson, Beryl Mansell, Celia Smith & others</i>
2012	When Women Flew Spitfires <i>by Frank Matthews</i>
2012	What Makes a Good Photograph? <i>by Janet Austin</i>

The Computer Group and Information Technology

Information Technology and Computer skills were always destined to be major contributors to the delivery of Sevenoaks U3A's ambitious objectives, though in the early days most of the lectures were illustrated using overhead and 35mm projectors.

The Computer Group began in 2001, meeting monthly with a talk from one of the members or an outside speaker. A £5000 Lottery Grant facilitated the purchase of the first set of audio-visual equipment, comprising a laptop computer and multimedia projector. There are now four sets of media equipment routinely used by U3A groups, managed by the Technical Support Group, whose members repair, maintain and set up equipment at meetings.

The spread of the personal computer has created a huge demand for training in basic computer skills for a generation which retired just as computer technology was taking off in commerce and industry. John Bonnett organised a training programme in computer skills, including Microsoft Word, Excel and Powerpoint, at the Bluewater Learning

Shop. These ran for several years and John will always recall being introduced to HRH The Princess Royal who visited the training centre. When these facilities closed John made arrangements with Wildernesse School, which resulted in a very successful series of



courses on basic programmes, plus Publisher and Adobe Digital Photo Manipulation.

Chris Streets took over from John as Chairman in 2008 and the ambitious programme continued for four more years. This included a training course in basic skills hosted by Bradbourne School but run by the Computer Group. Now

there are alternative local basic professional training facilities run by the charities Age UK and Mind, and members are referred to them.

In response to the changing needs of members, the Computer Group now focuses on its open meetings at Otford Village Memorial Hall. External professional speakers and members have addressed a wide range of topics. Other developments include the creation of the Apple Mac and iPad Group, led by David Simmons. There is also a constructive working relationship with the Knole U3A Computer Group.

Whilst these strategies continue under the current chairman, Mike Bamforth, the rapid development of technology presents the biggest challenge to the Computer Group. Experiments with smaller working groups to address skills training are under way. The proliferation of new computer devices such as 3D printers and wearable devices has only just begun!

Website history and development

The first version of the Sevenoaks U3A website was set up in 2003, and John Bonnett updated it annually after each AGM. In 2007, after attending a course on website design, Celia Smith and Sheelagh Mayes completely restructured the site.

In 2012 David Taylor proposed and undertook a further redesign of the website. He also tutored the other three members of the Website Team in the use of the software. Following an extensive trial, the new site was launched in January 2013 and aims to provide for the needs of both existing and potential new members. It contains an extensive range of easily navigable information including study group information, links to other useful sites and reports on events. It will continue to be developed in the future.

"The subjects that interest or intrigue are often the most unexpected topics."

Chairmen's Reflections

No organisation runs smoothly and purposefully without a good Chairman, and Sevenoaks U3A has been very fortunate in this respect since its inception in 1994. Following the example set by our founding Chairman and now President, we have benefitted from the different experiences of the Chairmen who 'passed the Chair' and led and guided us over the last twenty years.

Magda Sweetland MBE (Founder, Chairman 1994-2001, and President)

While I was Chairman it was clear that coping with a very large membership would soon become a major problem so controlling the annual intake was a priority. Also, back then, Sevenoaks was only the sixth U3A in the whole of Kent – there are now twenty-six - and our nearest U3As were Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone. That meant that the new members might come from quite far afield, and had a long journey to get to meetings.



Both of those reasons prompted the decision to start a new U3A in Tonbridge in 2001. The then

Membership Secretary, Adam Williams, who had lived in Tonbridge for many years, helped greatly with the set-up as did the Tunbridge Wells Chairman, John Hobbs. In the pre-internet era, this was quite a laborious process, and relied on making phone calls, writing letters to appropriate societies, and inserting articles in church magazines to create a groundswell of support. Fortunately, those Sevenoaks members who lived in Hildenborough or Tonbridge got behind the initiative and the launch was a great success, setting the framework for what has become another very large and successful U3A.

This pattern was repeated in 2007 with Malling and District U3A and then, in 2009, with Knole U3A. What is noteworthy is that each of these U3As has now gone on to assist other adjacent U3As to start up: Tonbridge and Pembury, Malling and Kingshill, Knole and Edenbridge plus Westerham. This is the ideal progression, as a form of organic growth, and it works particularly well when experienced Group Leaders offer their services either to initiate or to share groups in the new U3As. Some of these shared groups still survive.

The benefits of creating a cluster of adjacent U3As are immense: it is easy to discuss and share any problems with fellow Chairmen, Treasurers etc, and in practical ways to offer spare spaces on trips, seminars and study groups, where suitable. The new slogan at National Office is 'A U3A every five miles', which is rapidly becoming a reality. It is a testimony to the runaway success of this organisation countrywide and one where Sevenoaks has played a major role in the development of local U3As.

Bill Taylor (Chairman 2001-2004)



I joined Sevenoaks U3A some 18 months after it was formed; I still enjoy attending Open Meetings and Groups. I had been working in a group heavily involved in publishing the book "A History of the Parish of Chevening", when Magda, following a meeting, got me in a corner and said, "What are you going to do now?" I didn't think quickly enough to give an adequate reply and as a consequence I became Chairman.

The founder members were in the main retired educationalists, and my experience was entirely in commerce, but the two seemed to blend very well. One thing I tried to do was to sit in on meetings of various groups; I recall a Poetry Reading group, Vegetarian Cookery and Italian Conversation, but I'm sure there were more. Sevenoaks U3A then had about 450 members, many of whom didn't have email, which made communication quite often a question of picking up the phone. There was no website of course. Chairing a group with over 900 members and a much more complex organisation must present different problems to the ones I faced.

I hope I made a contribution to the development of Sevenoaks U3A, and wish it well for the future.

Pam Walshe (Chairman 2004-2007)



My first contact with the U3A was when I attended the inaugural meeting twenty years ago as one of my invitations as Town Mayor. I passed over a development grant cheque from the Town Council and wished the fledgling organisation well. I was impressed by the enthusiastic response of members at that meeting and I had a sense that this was going to be something good for the town so I joined. I never envisaged that ten years later I would be Chairman of this fast-growing U3A. Within months of taking over, the tenth birthday party took

place at Combe Bank. I enjoyed taking part in the revue and there was a most impressive photo exhibition of members' activities followed by champagne and cake to celebrate.

During my time as Chairman, membership grew rapidly; when I left office it had reached 807 with 114 study groups covering a wide range of subjects. I took a particular interest in visiting some of the groups that I did not belong to, to learn more about the subjects studied and the pleasure that members gained from them.

A few highlights that I remember are the first art exhibition which took place in the brand new art gallery at Bradbourne School, the

murder mystery evening that I took part in at Cricketts Farm and attending the annual group leaders' lunches held in the garden there. I took satisfaction from watching the increase in the number of study days, and how the topics spread out to new and interesting areas. It was a rewarding experience, when visiting the groups, to see the satisfaction gained by members in learning and sharing in such a happy environment. A particular highlight was hearing that our President had been awarded an MBE in the Birthday Honours.

Patrick Pascall (Chairman 2007-2011)



I was hardly through the door when Magda asked me to edit the Newsletter, a role which gave me a close insight into all that was going on. I was very impressed with the way it all worked, and particularly how the large number of study groups looked after themselves. I was honoured to be invited to chair the committee in 2007.

As a retired solicitor I tended to focus on semi-legal issues like the constitution and our responsibility for health and safety, but there were other big issues like whether or not we should expand or cap our numbers, and whether we should accept members of other U3As in our groups. I was blessed with a very strong committee who each represented a strand of what was going on and, by and large, we solved all issues at our regular and friendly meetings.

The monthly talk at the Community Centre, such an important U3A flagship, always presents the Chairman with a challenge - dealing with the plethora of people who want you to plug their event or activity, introducing and thanking the speaker, controlling the questions at the end, and standing by for a crisis – like the time Kate Williams, who was being assessed for her lecturing qualities by a university professor, was suddenly faced with our projector failing to display any of her slides!

I enjoyed my time as Chairman.

Bob Ruffles (Chairman 2011 to date)



I was aware of the U3A movement from around the mid-1990s so on retirement in 2005 I made enquiries and was pleased to find that the U3A was established in Sevenoaks. For me getting into Sevenoaks U3A was not straightforward as waiting lists existed for both membership and groups. Nevertheless, I joined the Science Group under John Eastwood's leadership. In 2010 I joined the Science Committee (then under Frank

Matthews' lead) and like our other Chairmen I was approached by Magda in 2011 inviting me to take the chair of our U3A. At this time we were already a large U3A with around 885 members. The changes that had occurred over the years were most noticeable in the way the majority of our members were now using personal computers.

What I have been impressed with during my time in office is the enthusiasm, talent and friendliness of our members and Group Organisers. The latter are an integral part of our U3A, undertaking the administration and leadership of the groups, and in some instances, arranging trips and holidays at home and abroad appropriate to their study activities. These skills were apparent at the Group Organisers' Conference last summer when much debate resulted in a number of innovative ideas for future consideration followed by a good lunch!

The logo chosen for our anniversary is symbolic of Sevenoaks and I am reminded of the quotation "Mighty oaks from little acorns grow." Just think, at the beginning Pam Walshe as Town Mayor in 1994 granted us £100, from which Magda and the founder members created the organisation we have today.

As we move forward, it can be expected that we will need to embrace change. The Third Age Trust is encouraging us to move towards the use of on-line resources. The adoption of further IT systems, where suited to our organisation, will enable us to be well equipped to face

the future. In the foregoing sections it is clear how we have grown and if this has provided some inspiration for you to become involved with ongoing activities then please get in touch with me. Your help would be very much appreciated.

In conclusion, I must pay tribute to the professionalism and dedication of our Executive Committee and all the supporting Committees who work hard behind the scenes, organising the wide range of activities we all enjoy.

Bob Ruffles
Chairman

"U3A encourages you to have a go – a new subject, be a volunteer, and try a new job."

Contributors

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